

TAFARI, DAWN NICOLE HICKS, Ph.D. Hip-Hop is More Than Just Music to Me: A Narrative Study Exploring The Counter-Stories of Black Men Elementary School Teachers from The Hip-Hop Generation. (2013)
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In this qualitative dissertation study, the researcher utilizes a critical race methodology to address the dearth of Black men who teach in America's elementary school classrooms. Through the lens of a Black Feminist and Hip-Hop Feminist, the researcher explores the reasons Black men from the Hip-Hop generation become elementary school teachers and how growing up as part of the Hip-Hop generation has influenced their identity development and pedagogical awareness. The counter-stories of nine Black men elementary school teachers from the Hip-Hop generation were collected via a narrative method in which one-on-one interviews and a Facebook Focus Group were administered. The results of this study include five "purposes" for teaching: Teaching as an act of resistance; Teaching as an act of otherfathering; Teaching as a calling; Teaching as an act of passion; and Teaching as an expression of Hip-Hop. Furthermore, this study offers a discussion on the utilization of Hip-Hop as a viable form of critical pedagogy.

HIP-HOP IS MORE THAN JUST MUSIC TO ME: A NARRATIVE STUDY
EXPLORING THE COUNTER-STORIES OF BLACK MEN
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS
FROM THE HIP-HOP
GENERATION

by

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To the memories of my Aunt Nettie “Bell” Hicks; my grandmothers Joan Miller and Clara Hicks; my grandfathers Edwin “Zoodie” Wilson, William Charles Miller, and David Hicks, Sr; my Uncle David Miller; and my Aunt Gloria Hicks.

To my partner, my love, my husband, my king, Nwachi Gamba Eze Tafari:

you inspire me to be a better human.

To my daughters, my princesses, Dé Nasara Tafari and Niani Gazi Elon Tafari:

you inspire me to be a better woman.

To Chris: you inspire me to be a better teacher.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I have two intellectual passions: the state of Black males in American k-12 schools and Hip-Hop. First, I want to talk about Hip-Hop. In 1996, singer Leschea sang the words “*Hip Hop, Hip Hop is more than just music to me*” (Leschea, 1996). Her words continue to resonate with me because Hip-Hop is absolutely more than just music to me. I have always loved Hip-Hop culture; I have always loved the music that signifies it. I mean I love R &B (Rhythm and Blues), but that’s my mother’s music – not mine. However, Hip-Hop is the music of “my people” – Young people, Black people, people from the inner city, people born between 1965 and 1984 (Kitwana, 2002). But, honestly, I had no choice in this love affair; Hip-Hop chose me. I was born in 1974, and its music, art, and language are the foundation of everything I know. The first record I ever bought was Salt n Pepa’s “The Showstoppa.” I paid \$3 for it in 1985, and I loved this song because it was a comeback (read: rebuttal) to Slick Rick and Doug E. Fresh’s “The Show”: a tale of how they met and subsequently dissed a girl. In “The Showstoppa,” Salt N Pepa respond – ferociously, fiercely, and unapologetically. I saw them as two strong women who weren’t taking any “mess” from these guys. They even had a girl deejay! I felt empowered. You see, I was a Hip-Hop feminist way back then; I was able to look past instances of

misogyny in some Hip-Hop music just as children are able to still love their drug-addicted parents. Hip-Hop is much more than just music to me; it is my culture; it reared me. I am Hip-Hop. Therefore, being critical of it is not easy for me. In fact, I am quite protective of it, as I am of myself.

Throughout my life, Hip-Hop has manifested within me in many ways. In high school, I joined a dance group. We performed at talent shows, and I, eventually, began to get cast in Hip-Hop and reggae music videos. I loved it! I loved the attention, the semi-celebrity status, and I loved being such an integral part of the culture that I loved so dearly. However, Hip-Hop began to change in the mid-1990s. That was right around the time when I began growing my locs, and I began to not be cast in videos as often. Furthermore, when the expectations of dancers began to change (wearing biker shorts and jeans changed to wearing bathing suits and booty shorts), I stopped accepting the castings I was offered. It was becoming the norm that more of the female body would be exposed in videos. Hip-Hop was becoming more and more commodified: corporate exploitation and media influence were manipulating mainstream Hip-Hop into something with which I had less and less in common. I felt that Hip-Hop and I were growing apart – moving in different directions. Nonetheless, I still loved it. I still saw my life in its reflection; I was just no longer willing to be so integrally involved in this facet of its change of face. I was still Hip-Hop, still deeply in love with this culture that raised me and helped me to see the world as a political, crazy, loving, selfish, kind, and dangerous place.

But *why* do I *still* love Hip-Hop? Knowing what I now know – what I now have the vocabulary to verbalize – concepts like commodification, misogyny, and exploitation-

how do I not only continue to support it but also choose to study and research its effects on my Black male counterparts? For me, Hip-Hop is one pathway to better understand many of the urban Black men around whom I was raised and/or have come to know in one way or another. Most of the Black men who I know and love (my husband, my brother, my cousins, my friends, my students) have experienced intense relationships with Hip-Hop. For instance, my husband grew up with the members of the rap group, Leaders of the New School and drove them to the studio to record their first album; my brother has been working as a promoter for Hip-Hop clubs and individual artists since 2003; and several of my male cousins are budding Hip-Hop artists who travel the country performing and searching for a record deal. Through Hip-Hop, many of the Black men I know feel free to express themselves and make their voices heard. Through Hip-Hop, I can oftentimes hear a Black man's pain, his frustration, his love, his passion, his fury, his desire. From songs like Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's "The Message" in which they said, "Don't push me 'cause I'm close to the edge. I'm trying not to lose my head!" (Fletcher, Mel, & Robinson, 1982), to Common's "The Corner", in which he tells us that "we write songs about wrong 'cause it's hard to see right" (Lynn, West, Oyewole, Hassan, & Moore, 2005), Black men have been crying out for a long time, and it's about time we start listening. Joan Morgan (1999) writes

As a black woman and feminist I listen to the music with a willingness to see past the machismo in order to be clear about what I'm *really* dealing with. What I hear frightens me....When brothers can talk so cavalierly about killing each other and then reveal that they have no expectation to see their twenty-first birthday, that is straight-up depression *masquerading* as machismo. (p.72-73)

It's about time we start paying attention to the real message in the music and start trying to understand the culture. I am not alone in my passion for Hip-Hop. There are many of us from my generation who share this complicated relationship with Hip-Hop. I know from my conversations with friends and colleagues, as well as from my lived experience, that Hip-Hop is more than music to a lot of people. Still, I wonder *how* others from my generation have been influenced and affected by Hip-Hop culture. I am especially interested in the relationship that Black males have with Hip-Hop.

Why my special interest in Black males? Well, as a former elementary school teacher and current teacher educator and community college professor, I work with all kinds of human beings on a daily basis. One of the things that I have consistently witnessed throughout my career as an educator has been the maltreatment and misfortune of Black males within the public education sector, and this maltreatment and misfortune is (and has been for a long time now) at crisis level. There is a crisis affecting Black boys in public schools; it presents itself in the form of skewed numbers of Black boys out of school on suspension and referred for special education services, as well as low high school graduation rates (Ferguson, 2001; Haggerty, 2009; Schott Report, 2011; Sundius & Farneth, 2008). In fact, much of the research on black male success in public schools sheds light on the significant achievement gap between black boys and their white counterparts in reading and mathematics – in more than 40 states (Ferguson, 2001; Gause, 2008; Kunjufu, 1985; Noguera, 2008; Vanneman, July 2009). It should be noted, however, that this achievement gap is measured using standardized testing methods that quantify a very narrow scope of “traditional” intellect. I offer this information not to

imply any differences in the cognitive abilities between Black and white boys; instead, I offer this to illuminate the lack of authentic, critical educational experiences being offered in American schools. However, a detailed discussion of this is outside the scope of my dissertation. Nonetheless, this crisis is a serious problem, and I can see and hear instances of this pain in Hip-Hop music and reflected in the actions of Hip-Hop youth.

While there are several avenues that can be taken to rectify the crisis affecting Black boys in schools today, one of the ways that we may be able to help eliminate these gender and racial disparities is by immersing black boys in an educational environment in which they have realistic role models who share some of their cultural experiences and value their cultural capital (Lynn, 2001). Effective Black men teachers can serve as walking counter-narratives for the boys they teach and with whom they interact on a daily basis (Howard, 2000; Lynn, 2006). These consistent, positive interactions can help to improve the academic success of Black boys and make schooling a more profitable and pleasurable experience for these boys.

However, more effective Black men teachers are not needed just to mentor Black boys. All children are better off when they are exposed to a variety of educators, mentors, and role models. Morgan (1999) addresses the importance of these Black male figures in the lives of Black girls from the Hip-Hop generation:

Black America is quickly becoming a nation of fatherless daughters. The hip-hop generation is the product of that one-out-of-two divorce rate....The statistics do not begin to tell our stories – the daughters who’ve had violence, imprisonment, illness, addiction, depression, or abandonment rob them of fathers – both physically and emotionally.... Precious little attention is paid to the significant role black men play in shaping their daughters’ ideas about themselves and love. (122-123)

My point here is not to divert attention to a conversation about absentee fathers. The point is that all children can benefit from the existence of effective Black male figures in their lives – whether at home or at school. Because children spend many of their waking hours in schools, those who do not have effective Black male figures in their lives at home may benefit from that presence at school – especially during the crucial developmental stages that occur during the elementary years.

Unfortunately, there are very few male figures present in elementary classrooms. Cottman (2010) reports that “only 1.7 percent of the nation's 4.8 million public school teachers are black men.” Moreover, Nelson (2002) reports that “[a]ccording to the Bureau of Labor Statistics..., 16.2% of teachers in elementary schools are men” (p.4). These numbers concern me because I believe that men are quite capable of providing the much needed nurturing that younger children require. However, there are several reasons why these numbers are so low.

These declining and low numbers have been linked to factors such as non-competitive salaries; for elementary teachers, a lack of coaching opportunities to supplement salaries; cultural fears of being labeled as gay or of being regarded as potential child abusers; and the low social status of the teaching profession (Callas, 2003; DeMonte, 2004; Diamond, 2003a; Walzer, 2003; Williams, 2001). (Nweke, et al., 2004, p.6)

These four reasons are prevalent throughout much of the research on men in K-12 education. Knowing these reasons, I began this research with the desire to amplify the voice of the minority: Black men elementary school teachers from the Hip-Hop generation. I sought to uncover some of the reasons why - in spite of the low pay, minimal opportunities to supplement income, cultural implications stemming from the

feminization of teaching, and the profession's low status – Black men from this generation do teach on the elementary school level. I was interested in talking to these men. Furthermore, I was interested in exploring the possible connections among, specifically, Black male students, Black men teachers, and Hip-Hop.

Statement of the Problem

In 1993, Casey wrote, “[t]he dearth of research on male schoolteachers’ experiences and interpretations continues to be a serious deficit in our educational knowledge and understanding” (p.239-240). Since 1993, several researchers have sought to fill this void (Bridges, 2009; Gibson, 2009; Lynn, 2001; 2006 – to name a few); however, there is still much to be known about men teachers, especially Black men teachers. Furthermore, not much is known about Black men teachers from the Hip-Hop generation – a generation that is unique for a number of reasons (Bridges, 2009; Kitwana, 2002; Morgan, 1999). Though in his 2009 dissertation, Thurman Bridges collected the life histories of African-American male teachers from the Hip-Hop generation, his participants were not all teaching at the time of the study, and none of them were elementary school teachers. Therefore, the problem this study addresses is that dearth of knowledge about Black men elementary school teachers from the Hip-Hop generation. My goal was to contribute to the body of knowledge on Black men teachers, specifically expanding the research base on Black men elementary school teachers from the Hip-Hop generation.

I know the role that Hip-Hop has played in my life, and I was interested in learning how and/or if Hip-Hop has impacted the lives of Black men elementary school

teachers from the Hip-Hop generation. Much of my research to date illustrates that Hip-Hop does have an effect on Black male identity development, and I have listened to their personal stories and identified patterns among the educational, experiential, and cultural experiences that these teachers have had. The point of my research is to assist teacher educators and society-at-large in better understanding what may help some Black males (and many other students as well – regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender) to be successful in school and to help increase their positive experiences, hopefully increasing the number of men who become educators (thereby increasing the amount of positive male role models for boys in schools). It was also my intention to provide a sense of community for current Black men elementary school teachers so that they know they are not alone. Finally, it was my hope, at the onset of this study, that someone would find the opportunity to tell his story as cathartic – perhaps, clearing a path for him to help better serve his students and mentor young men considering the field for themselves.

Research Questions

For this dissertation study, I interviewed Black men teachers who were born during the Hip-Hop generation. The following research questions guided my study:

1. What are the types of life experiences that shape Black men from the Hip-Hop generation into elementary school teachers?
2. What inspires Black men to teach elementary school children despite the societal stigmas?
3. How does Hip-Hop culture impact the identity development and pedagogy of Black men who become elementary school teachers?

Summary

In this introduction, I shared my personal story and reasons for loving Hip-Hop. As a Black girl who was raised in the Bronx in the 1970s and 1980s, exposure to Hip-Hop was a given. As a member of the Hip-Hop generation, this influence has stayed with me throughout my life and academic career. Now it has colored my concern for the crisis affecting Black boys in school and the dearth of Black male teachers. I identified myself as a Hip-Hop feminist who is passionate about learning more about Black men elementary school teachers from the Hip-Hop generation. Three research questions are stated. In the chapter that immediately follows this, Chapter 2, I review the literature as it relates to critical pedagogy, the feminization of teaching, and the influences of Hip-Hop on identity. I also address my theoretical framework - an intersection of Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought. In Chapter 3, I discuss my epistemology and explain how I utilized a critical race methodology to uncover the participants' purposes for teaching elementary school children. I also introduce you to the Black men elementary school teachers from the Hip-Hop generation who participated in this study. In Chapter 4, I discuss my findings, presenting the five purposes that the nine participants have for teaching. In Chapter 5, I share the conclusions that I have drawn from my research, answering each of my research questions. I also share the implications for this research. I close Chapter 5 with closing thoughts.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are several theories that inform my thinking about Black men teachers and Hip-Hop. In my Literature Review, I discuss the works of scholars in various fields that are relevant to my research. These works are grouped in theories. The first is critical pedagogy. Using critical pedagogy, I analyze the work of critical scholars such as Maxine Greene, Henry Giroux, H. Svi Shapiro, Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade, and Ernest Morell to examine the role that American schools play in the maltreatment and misfortune of Black males through a process of sorting and stratification. The second concept that I review is the feminization of teaching. I probe into the causes and effects of the feminization of teaching as another avenue to reinforce the present state of Black males in American schools through the alienation of Black males in several ways. Finally, I explore the work of Hip-Hop educational researchers and theorize Hip-Hop as a multi-faceted identity that is fluid and powerful. This chapter concludes with my Theoretical Framework. I situate my theoretical position between critical race and Black feminist theories in order to dictate a research methodology that best helped me to learn about Black men teachers from the Hip-Hop generation.

Literature Review

Critical Pedagogy: U.S. Schools As Sorting Machines

The primary and most insidious lesson of education is the legitimacy of unequal treatment and differential human value. School is nothing if it is not a vehicle for the transmission of hierarchical distinctions of respect, worth, ability, and economic expectations. (Shapiro, 2009, p. 8).

Critical education scholars, like H. Svi Shapiro, argue that schools in the U.S. are ‘sorting machines’ because they transmit the hierarchical distinctions that reflect and legitimate the social and economic inequalities in this country. These social and economic inequalities result from the unequal distribution of wealth and opportunity, causing a number of socio-economic classes that are stratified according to the level of power possessed. Critical education scholars say that Americans have created and work hard to maintain a society that is stratified (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 1998; hooks, 2000; Greene, 1988; Giroux, 2006). For instance, Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2008) assert that

[t]he stratified nature of our society creates a social pyramid that has no room at the top for the masses. This structure requires people to be sorted, and schools are the mechanism used to resolve this messy social conundrum.... (p. 3)

In other words, in order to fulfill the task of sorting each American into a place in the social pyramid, schools must transmit a particular type of ideology in order to make this sorting possible. H. Svi Shapiro (2006) defines the term “ideology” as “the ideas and beliefs that hold sway in society” and as “ways of making sense of our world that are not just intellectually persuasive but also seem to conform to what seems like common

sense” (p.127). Microcosms of American society, American schools are charged with the task of transmitting and perpetuating specific ideologies that make “the sorting and ranking of human beings plausible, predictable, and necessary” (p.127). These ideologies are dangerous because they are centered on false beliefs that we hold on to so tightly that we become convinced they are the truth; they imprison our hearts, minds, and souls, making us prisoners of our own doing. Schools are challenged to take the youth of a broken and dysfunctional society and make them pass standardized tests that are based on dry curriculums filled with cultural biases. All of these factors contribute to the many social and economic inequalities that exist in this country today. Therefore, I agree with critical education scholars’ argument about schools’ role in society and discuss my thoughts and research that supports the idea that America is a country that is – metaphorically speaking- infected with affluenza, is overrun with racist and classist ideologies, and is pervaded by an overstandardized education system.

The role of affluenza.

America’s infection with affluenza is a major reason for many of the gross economic inequalities that exist today. According to deGraaf, Wann, and Naylor’s 2005 book, *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic*, affluenza is “a painful, contagious, socially transmitted condition of overload, debt, anxiety, and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more” (p.2). I am not sure which came first: the American addiction to material items, or the capitalist ideology that infiltrates American souls and perpetuates this addiction. I wonder this because though American affluence has provided opportunities for many people, it has also ruined a lot of people’s dreams and destroyed

their fantasies of a life happily ever after. Furthermore, this capitalist ideology has created massive separation between the classes. In fact,

during the '80s, three-quarters of the increase in pretax real income went to the wealthiest 1 percent of families, who gained an average of 77 percent. Median-income families saw only a 4 percent gain, while the bottom 40 percent of families actually lost ground.... [W]hat is uncontested is the astoundingly unequal distribution of the gains. (p.82)

This skewed distribution of material wealth serves to continuously expand the chasm that exists between the classes, creating a breeding ground for classist and racist practices to fester and persist. Affluenza is an American ideology that acts as justification for these social and economic inequalities. Hence, the poor become non-important and invisible to the affluent. This invisibility serves to illuminate the economic inequalities, creating social differences, while fueling the sorting process.

The role of race and class.

America's infatuation with race and class are major sources of the gross social inequalities that persist and provide fuel for the sorting process. The social gap between the rich and the poor is often made even more apparent when one looks at the residential communities in which they live and the conditions of the schools in their respective districts. In a 2000 interview with *The Christian Century*, Jonathan Kozol asserts that "public schools today are every bit as segregated as they were in 1964" (p. 541). Schools, especially those in inner-cities, tend to be predominantly White or predominantly Black and Latino – not heterogeneously mixed. In his 2005 article, "Still Separate, Still Unequal", he offered precise statistics to support this statement. The

staggering numbers highlight the distressing fact that most schools in inner cities have Black and Latino student populations that range from 79 to 100% of the entire student body, and while many school districts boast about serving diverse student populations and having curriculums that address “the needs of children from diverse backgrounds”, I think most can agree that 79 – 100% Black and Latino is not diverse; it’s actually quite homogeneous. In addition, these school districts do not receive funding equal to that of their white counterparts. The segregated school districts that Kozol visited are not equal. Like the Supreme Court ruling, segregated schools were unequal in 1954, and they are unequal today. In fact, Kozol (2005) found that in 1998, “New York’s Board of Education spent about \$8,000 yearly on the education of a third-grade child in a New York City public school” (p. 45) while predominantly white suburbs in New York spent about \$12, 000 a year per child. Furthermore, New York’s wealthiest white suburbs provided their children with “as much as \$18,000 worth of public education every year....” (p.45). What this also shows is that the more affluent a community is, the more superior its schools are, and the more “diverse” a community is, the more inferior its schools are. The \$10,000 difference in school spending is evidence that separation by race and class is not equal.

America’s obsession with race and class (and the inevitable divisions that arise from said obsession) has definitively led to an extremely formidable and incomparable

meritocracy of money in which good education is passed on from one generation to the next. With privilege goes the opportunity to earn enough money so that you can live in a wealthy suburb and perpetuate this inequality by passing it on to your children. (Christian Century , 2000, p. 542)

This “meritocracy of money” is based on *and* fuels social divisions in this country. The children of rich people receive expensive educations and are encouraged to follow in their parents’ successful footsteps. However, poor children in America are not educated in the same fashion; they are trained to be good workers, not thinkers, who follow directions and do not challenge the status quo (Anyon, 1980). They are trained to follow in *their* parents’ footsteps so that they can eventually take their places at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy. In the interview with *The Christian Century* (2000), Kozol passionately asserts,

[i]t’s a profoundly racist agenda. We [White people] would never speak about our own children this way. We educate them to go on to universities and acquire the broad, sophisticated base of knowledge from which they can make real choices, and change their choices many times. But for the children of poor people we’re stripping the curriculum, removing the arts and music, and drilling the children into useful labor. (p. 542)

I agree with Kozol. As an educator who has taught children and adults from various socio-economic backgrounds, I have witnessed this agenda at work. I have been chastised by Black parents (who were so consumed by these racist, classist ideologies) because I was talking with my third grade students about college and had assigned them a “My Future College” poster project to complete. They did not see my role as a Black elementary school teacher of Black elementary school children in West Baltimore as one who should be educating their children “to go on to universities” or to seek life experiences that help them to “acquire the broad, sophisticated base of knowledge from which they can make real choices.” Nor did they see me as one who wanted to enable their children “on some level to open spaces for themselves – spaces for communicating

across boundaries, for choosing, for becoming different” (Greene, 1991, p. 2). Instead, these parents informed me that my job was to get their children to the next grade. I was disappointed, and I found this disheartening because I was wide-awake; I was open and concretely aware of the world around me, and I wanted so badly to expose their children to a liberatory education that could help them learn how to make “real choices” for themselves. In addition, it seemed that each year, another aspect of the arts and recess was being excised from the public schools in order to allow more time for test preparation. With these changes, I began to feel more and more confined and frustrated by the restrictions on my teaching and the lack of district-level administrative support. Consequently, I soon left the school system because I refused to be a drone or prepare children for “useless labor”. I gave up, and I do not always feel good about that because I believe those children really needed me. Moreover, I wasn’t the only teacher to leave at that time. Many good teachers were beginning to feel frustrated and overwhelmed by the lack of autonomy and the intense focus on standardized testing – a focus that I believe served to alienate teachers and stratify students into neat little categories on the social pyramid. During my years as an elementary school teacher, I witnessed as education was becoming more and more standardized. My leaving the public schools was a reaction, in large part, to this overstandardization and the school system’s blatant attempts to ignore social and economic differences and label children based on their test scores.

The role of overstandardization.

The social and economic inequalities rampant in the United States are perpetuated by an overstandardized education system that sorts our youth into hierarchies and trains

them to become citizen worker bees, a system that takes wide-awake, critical-thinking teachers (like me) and turns them into clerks, a system that “responds by making testing the object of teaching and, in the bargain, robs teachers of their intellectual autonomy, not to say intellectual function” (Freire, 1998, p.15). In order to successfully sort children, the teachers’ autonomy must be taken away - just as in my experience. My discussions and projects on college were discouraged because they did not fit into the parents’ ideas of what should be taught. They had bought into the ideology that “children at school [should] learn the ‘rules’ of good behavior, i.e. the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour, according to the job he is ‘destined’ for” (Althusser, 1970, p. 4) instead of allowing and encouraging their children to manifest their own destinies. Instead of asserting that these elementary school children learn what they need to be prepared to transcend their current social class, the parents and school administration supported the ideology that in inner city schools,

students in different social-class backgrounds are rewarded for classroom behaviors that correspond to personality traits allegedly rewarded in the different occupational strata—the working classes for docility and obedience, the managerial classes for initiative and personal assertiveness. (Anyon, 1980, p. 67)

Kozol witnessed this ideology at work when he visited schools across the country in the 1990s and early 2000s. He writes about entire school districts adopting forms of “Taylorism... a set of theories about the management of factory employees introduced by Frederick Taylor in the early 1900s” and “primitive utilitarianism” (Kozol, 2005, p. 49) in the classroom in order to train the children to be more obedient and help them develop into “productive citizens”. One teacher with whom Kozol talks recognized that many of

the techniques that she was trained to use with her students were also techniques that she could use with her dog.

The concept of using factory employee management techniques to manage children in inner city schools speaks volumes about the mindsets of those in power and what they believe the purpose of schools to be. They use these techniques to perpetuate the creation and maintenance of American “hierarchical distinctions”. Anyon writes,

Basil Bernstein, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michael W. Apple focusing on school knowledge, have argued that knowledge and skills leading to social power and regard (medical, legal, managerial) are made available to the advantaged social groups but are withheld from the working classes to whom a more “practical” curriculum is offered (manual skills, clerical knowledge). (Anyon, 1980, p. 67)

The learning opportunities that can offer poor students the chance to transcend class are minimal in inner-city schools. Instead, these children are encouraged to take courses that will prepare them to take their places as part of the working class. When talking with Fremont High School students in Los Angeles, Kozol (2005) found this concept to be still very true. Students tearfully complained that they wanted to go to college but were forced to take classes like sewing and hairdressing because those were the only Technical Arts (a required area of study) courses available at their school. While across town at Beverly Hills High School, classes like residential architecture and broadcast journalism were available to help students meet their Technical Arts requirement.

Not only are the curricula controlled, but the method of overall distribution of information also varies by socio-economic class. Anyon (1980) expresses the following about working class schools in her study: “work is following the steps of a procedure.

The procedure is usually mechanical, involving rote behavior and very little decision making or choice. The teachers rarely explain what is assigned....” (p. 69). 25 years later, Kozol wrote something very similar about how the tone of learning is set in many inner-city schools. Explaining that school-based administration and teachers have “embraced a pedagogy of direct command and absolute control” (Kozol, 2005, p. 48), he quotes one South Bronx principal giving instructions to her students: “If you do what I tell you to do, how I tell you to do it, when I tell you to do it, you’ll get it right” (p. 47). This training in rote behavior and following of explicit instructions are excellent examples of what Louis Althusser calls the “reproduction of labour-power”. In a 1970 essay, he writes

the reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers. (p. 4)

In other words, the oppressed have to buy into oppression so that the oppressor can continue to oppress them from the inside out. This reproduction is necessary because if people do not believe in the legitimacy and purpose of the sorting, then they will not participate in it as audaciously as they do. Now this does not always happen neatly and cleanly; however, Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) concur that

schools are the primary place where economic futures are cast and people are sorted into their roles in society (Anyon, 1981; Carnoy & Levin, 1985; Finn, 1999). In short, some people must fill the least desirable places in society, and it is important that they feel they deserve to be in those positions.... (p.2-3)

Through reproduction, schools justify all positions in society. They help people *feel they deserve* to be in whatever place in the social pyramid into which they have been sorted.

Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) lend further support to the argument that schools are indeed ‘sorting machines’ that reflect and legitimate social and economic inequalities in the United States. They boldly assert that when school funds and resources are -without limit- unequally and inequitably distributed, “we have predetermined winners and losers.... Urban schools are not broken; they are doing exactly what they are designed to do” (p.1). This is an obvious and painful truth for me because I grew up in the inner-city – in the Bronx. I taught in the inner-city – in Brooklyn, New York and in Baltimore, Maryland. I have seen how schools take on the role of “one form of ideological management” as they distribute politicized knowledge to young people (Spring, 2005, p. 4). I still see the evidence of an educational system that was developed to acculturate, deculturate, and “ensure the dominance of Anglo-American values” (p.3). It is clear to me that schools do still serve such a purpose. If they don’t, then I ask why would a country that is as rich in material and human resources as the United States of America, tolerate having so many of its schools – particularly the schools in many of its biggest cities – in such disarray? In response, Duncan-Andrade and Morrell declare that “perpetual urban school failure is tolerated [because] deep down our nation subscribes to the belief [or ideology] that *someone* has to fail in school” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p.2, emphasis mine). This ideology (which these authors call “quasi-Darwinian”) “is built into most schools through the existence of a largely unchallenged pedagogical system of grading and testing that by its very design

guarantees failure for some” (p.2). This guaranteed failure for some maintains the social pyramid. Moreover, it is no mistake that the *some* who most often fail are poor and working class Black and Latino minorities, and those who excel are those who possess and have steady access to “the culture of power” (Delpit, 1988, p. 282). The lack of access to the culture of power, infiltration of affluenza, pervasiveness of racist and classist practices, together with the reproduction of labour power are the biggest and most crucial components of the ‘sorting machines’ that we call American schools.

When all components of the sorting machine are in in good working order, there is room for everyone in the pyramid; but not everyone can be at the top. Those who exist within the culture of power belong to the small elite group at the top; those with some access to the culture of power fit into a larger group in the middle; and those with little to no access, stay undemocratically—in the largest group- at the bottom. Critical education scholars agree that the American education system maintains this social pyramid by keeping the top nice and small and the bottom as big as possible because it provides for a strong foundation for the top two portions of the pyramid. However, there are so many people who fit into this bottom stratum that many of them are seen as disposable. Thanks to the work of American schools, Black males belong to this disposable group. In her 2001 text, *bad boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity*, Ferguson explains that in schools

African American boys...are doubly displaced: as black children, they are not seen as childlike but adultified; as black males, they are denied the masculine dispensation constituting white males as being “naturally naughty” and are discerned as willfully bad. (Ferguson, 2001, p. 80)

In a public school system in which White women make up 83% of the elementary school teaching population (Kunjufu, 2011), these images of Black males are projected upon them and used against them as punishment for the resulting behaviors. By adultifying and criminalizing Black boys, their status in the lowest stratum of the social pyramid is justified and maintained. The saddest part about this is that many boys

are conscious of the fact that school adults have labeled them as problems, social and educational misfits; that what they bring from home and neighborhood – family structure and history, forms of verbal and nonverbal expression, neighborhood lore and experiences – has little or even deficit value. (Ferguson, 2001, p. 169)

Black males' cultural capital is not valued in school. Hence, their lack of access to the culture of power leads to gross racial and gender disparities in the numbers of Black boys in special education and out of school on suspension. Gause (2008) expresses that Black males continue to fall behind all other subgroups in academics and are "overly identified for special education programs and suspended from school far more than any other student group..." (p.5). The 2008 Schott Report illuminates these racial disparities. It states that "schools attended mostly by Black students...suspend and expel disproportionately more Black male students than White male students, and assign more Black male students than White male students to special education..." (5). Accordingly, Giroux (2009) supports the concept that Black males have been identified as disposable as he argues that "many schools either simply warehouse young Black males or put them on the fast track to prison incarceration or a future of control under the criminal justice system" (p. 230). The research in critical education and critical race theory incessantly

shows that the odds are severely stacked up against Black boys. In addition, I have witnessed this sorting, sometimes inconspicuously and sometimes obviously, take place in the schools in which I've worked, and as a result, I have made it my charge to work against this process. I agree wholeheartedly with critical theory scholars who say that schools are 'sorting machines', and it pains me that know that schools do such an effective job at maintaining the social pyramid and perpetuating the social and economic inequalities that exist in this country.

Hence, I close this section with a story of about my interaction with a young man named Chris. My first year as a sixth grade teacher in Brooklyn, New York, I had a young Black and Puerto Rican male student named Chris. Chris was in foster care – had been for some time – and oozed with wit and personality. He was charming and intelligent. He was also quite rambunctious, often ending up in trouble. As Chris' teacher, I was almost always pleased by his academic performance: he completed his assignments quickly and skillfully. However, once he was finished, he would set in harassing the other students, getting out of his seat, and being disruptive. I moved Chris' seat around the room in an effort to find the least distracting placement, but Chris had a way about getting his way. For example, when the Yankees swept the Mets winning the Subway Series, Chris harassed me until I unwillingly conceded to his demonstration of what the Yankees had done: Chris ran around the classroom with my broom saying, "This is what the Yankees did! THEY SWEEEEEEPPPPPTTT THE METS!" My frustrations grew with Chris' behavior, but I never referred him for special education services or recommended him for in- or out-of school suspension as some of my

colleagues had suggested. Why? Because I knew that he had been institutionalized since he was a young boy and that more institutionalization was not what he needed to achieve success. What I believed he needed was a break, a second chance at moving up the social pyramid. I took on Chris that year, matching his misbehavior with my own brand of cool discipline. I also took him to the homecoming football game at my alma mater to show him that college was within his reach. However, I lost touch with Chris after that year. He was moved to another home, and I got married and moved to Maryland. Nonetheless, he always stayed on my mind and in my heart, and I wondered for years how his life turned out. Would other teachers try to understand him as I did? Would they label him as a problem? Adultify him? Criminalize him? My questions were answered just a few months before writing this when Chris friended me on Facebook. I cried tears of joy as I looked at his college graduation picture with his “mom and dad”. I continued to cry when I heard his voice on the telephone, and he told me that his mom and dad adopted him when he was 16. And I cried even more when he told me how *I changed his life*. He said, “You were the first person to ever tell me I could go to college.” He also told me that he had one Black man teacher in middle school who was also “really cool.” Now, of course, I do not take full credit for Chris’ success. He was blessed to get adopted at the age of 16 by two wonderful people who gave him lots of love, paid for him to earn a Bachelor’s degree at a prestigious HBCU in the South, and are now paying for him to pursue his Master’s degree in Social Work at a prestigious PWI in the North. However, I wonder where he would be today if I had not told him that he was smart enough to succeed in college, or if I had followed my colleagues’ advice and referred Chris for

special education. I wonder what Chris would have done with his time if I had him sent home (to his foster parent) on suspension. Would Chris have still ended up in college at 18, or on Rikers Island? Thankfully, I will never know the answer to that question. But what I do now know (based on my conversation with Chris) is that my refusal to transmit a specific hierarchical distinction that would have helped Chris find his predetermined place in the social pyramid and my willingness to disregard the ideology that would have made *my life* that year as Chris' teacher *easier*, made *his life better*. And isn't that what schools are supposed to do?

The Feminization Of Teaching As A Barrier For African-American Male Teachers

Unless we focus on the few alongside the many, we not only lose the voices of the few, but we also lose any meaningful understanding of the relationship between the few and the many, particularly in terms of power, privilege, disempowerment, and empowerment. (Estelle Disch as cited in Sargent, 2001, p.16)

The above epigraph highlights the importance of thinking about the issues affecting male teachers. It is taken from Paul Sargent's *Real Men or Real Teachers? Contradictions in the Lives of Men Elementary School Teachers* (2001) – a book with a title that is telling of the problems existing in the teaching profession today. Men are not considered “real men” if they teach, especially if they teach young children. But why is this so? There are many types of analyses that I could make to address this question: social, political, economic, and historic. However, to analyze each of these factors is outside the scope of this literature review. What I do address is a more social analysis of the answer to the question “why is this so?” I specifically plan to discuss how the feminization of the elementary teaching workforce alienates men, especially African

American men, and in turn serves as a barrier to those who wish to enter the profession. This happens in several ways. First, the movement to feminize teaching created an ideology that teaching was “women’s work”; hence, the act of teaching is contrary to the American masculine ideal. Second, the feminization of teaching acts to decrease the number of African American boys who achieve academic success and increase the number of African American boys who disidentify with school. Last, African American men looking to enter the profession are countered with negative stereotypes that paint distorted images of them. I write for “the few”: African American male elementary school teachers who try to wade their way through the treacherous waters of a profession dominated by middle-class white women. Because there are so few African American male teachers, their voices are often not heard, and they go about misunderstood, disempowered, and alienated.

Black men and “women’s work”?

The movement to feminize teaching alienated Black men because it created an ideology that is contrary to the American masculine ideal. At one point in colonial America, almost all schoolteachers were men. However, “[a]fter the Revolutionary War, girls and women gained access to formal instruction and gradually became teachers in what were called common schools” (Nelson, 2002, p. 2). This access for girls and women marked a change of face for teaching as a profession, but the most significant facet of this gender shift occurred during the 1800s. This shift, led in large part by a movement spearheaded by Catharine Beecher (Villaverde, 2008), is what made teaching become known as “women’s work”. In 1829, Beecher laid the groundwork for the

argument for women as teachers when she published, "Suggestions Respecting Improvements in Education." In this publication and her ensuing campaign, she promoted women as natural teachers because of their maternal instincts and advocated for the development of teacher training programs for women. These women teachers, at the time, were expected to rely more on their "maternal instincts" instead of their intellect. Then, enters Calvin Stowe. He was one of the founders of the Western Literary Institute -one of the earliest associations for professional teaching in the United States- (Spring, 2005) and Catharine Beecher's brother-in-law. In 1837, Stowe presented his "Report on Elementary Public Instruction in Europe" to the Ohio government. In his report, he stated, "there is not the same variety of tempting employment for females as for men. They can be supported cheaper, and the Creator has given them peculiar qualifications for the education of the young" (p.140). In other words, because women have the biological ability to give birth to children, they have little usefulness in the public sphere, and are, therefore, worthy of less pay than men. Stowe's report was widely distributed and very well-received in school districts throughout Ohio, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.

Hence, the ideology ingrained in American brains was that women were the obvious choice for educating children, not men. In other words, teaching was feminized; therefore, men— by design - were destined to be out of place in the profession because the American masculine ideal encompasses "an elite heterosexual male" (Mutua, 2006, p. 13) who is "opposing and superior to the feminine" (p.12). This ideal is a standard against which "a man's masculinity is measured" (p.13). Consequently, the erroneous belief is

that men who teach young children cannot be “real men.” Moreover, Black men present as less than “real men” because of their initial Blackness and lack of elite status. Mutua describes Black men's inability to fit into the schema of the masculine ideal with the term “gendered racism [, a term that] accounts for representations, or stereotypes, and practices directed toward Black men because they are both Black and men” (p.18). Because of this intersection of race, gender, and class, Black men are oppressed by “gendered racism” as they “are not only oppressed by racism but that their oppression is gendered” (p.5). This composite of racialized gendered oppressions is also addressed by Lance T. McCready, in his book *Making Space for Diverse Masculinities: Difference, Intersectionality, and Engagement in an Urban High School*. He explains that intersectional theorizing is essential because

it shifts the entire analytical focus from an ‘additive’ approach that ‘prioritize(s) one form of oppression as primary and then handles remaining types of oppression as variables within what is seen as the most important system’ (Collins, 2000, p.20) to explaining the links among multiple systems of oppression. (p.7)

In other words, the application of intersectional theory to Black men teachers’ experiences illuminates the fact that racism blocks Black men's access to achieving the masculine ideal, and the feminization of teaching blocks Black men’s access to the profession. Hence, alienation ensues.

The alienation of black boys.

These road blocks perpetuate the ideology that teaching is contrary to what a “real” Black man is. When Black boys look around (in school), they do not see

themselves in their teachers. This is a major problem because the elementary school years are a crucial period in human development. Children begin to develop their identities around age three; this is about the time when they begin their schooling experience. As the majority of elementary school teachers are women, boys do not have ample opportunities to interact with men during this crucial time in their development as “men are largely absent at the stage when gender identities are being formed” (Drudy, et.al., 2005, p.26). Furthermore, because most Black males

can go from elementary to high school without observing one Black men teacher, Black male students don’t get an opportunity to see how being a teacher benefits Black men, so they don’t feel confident that they either can or should become one. (Gibson, 2009, p. 17)

This lack does nothing to encourage Black boys to grow into men who become teachers. There are already a multitude of challenges facing Black males today, and this lack does not help. Michael Datcher’s (2001) story illuminates the tug-of-war that goes on within the hearts and minds of young Black males when they are going through intense periods of identity formation. The struggle between trying to do what is right for mama [i.e., doing well in school] and not being “a punk in front of the homies” (p.72) is a real life or death struggle that plagues the young urban Black male soul. Thus, Black men who decide to teach must overcome barriers by learning to “balance two souls” (Tafari, 2004, p. 100) and “succeed in both worlds by adopting multiple identities” (Noguera, 2008, p. 9). And adopting multiple identities can be quite difficult when one feels alienated and is without walking counter-narratives. Walking counter-narratives are important because they “offer insight into the reality, victories and challenges of marginalized people....”

(Cooper & McCoy, 2009). They are Black men who are successfully navigating the waters of gendered racism. Walking counter-narratives are Black men who demonstrate strength, beauty, and power and are positive examples of what Black boys are capable of achieving when they learn how to “balance two souls”.

Likewise, the feminization of teaching does not support this balance. In actuality, it serves to limit the number of African American boys who achieve academic success because it contributes to their disidentification with school. Gibson (2009) quotes Xue Lan Rong:

female teachers perceived female students more positively regardless of teachers’ race. White female teachers perceived White students more positively the same way that they perceived White male students more positively than Black male students, but Black female teachers made no distinction. (p.11)

Black boys, because their gender is compacted by their race, are marginalized in a school system in which there are 2 million white female teachers, 680,000 white male teachers, 195,000 Black female teachers (comprising 8% of all female teachers), and 62,000 Black men teachers (7.67% of all male teachers) (Gibson, 2009). This lack of cultural congruence and surplus of negative opinion causes an imbalance in American schools as Black boys struggle for academic, cultural, and emotional survival and equitable treatment in educational, political, and social settings. They begin to disidentify with school in an effort to “survive” the feminized and somewhat alien school culture. Boys tend to react by developing “a male counterculture in which the school [is] a place for sissies and girls” (Kunjufu, 1985). Boys are often chastised by their teachers, suspended more frequently from school, and referred for special education services more frequently

than girls (Gause, 2008). The overwhelming number of special education referrals and out-of-school suspensions sets up Black boys to miss out on educational and professional self-fulfilling experiences (Ferguson, 2001). Not understanding the institutional forces working against them, Black boys fall prey to these intersecting obstacles, wearing like masks the very characteristics forced upon them. These inequitable situations affect how Black boys are viewed by others and how they view themselves. These oppositional or negative academic experiences stay with Black boys; so when they grow up, they're less likely to want to be a part of the very educational system that ostracized them. Noguera (2008) states that though

Black males may engage in behaviors that contribute to their underachievement and marginality, ... they are also more likely to be channeled into marginal roles and to be discouraged from challenging themselves by adults who are supposed to help them. (p.31)

This cultural disconnect matters. A lack of walking counter-narratives who understand that “there is a clear disadvantage to being born Black and male in America” (Gause, 2001. p.26) spins the wheel of perpetual failure for Black boys. Black men teachers can identify with Black male students because they may have an “intimate knowledge of and ... respect for ‘the street’ [as] a place of both comfort and anger. It is their understanding of this delicate balance that makes them unique and all the more vital....” (Lynn, 2006, p. 12). Without this kind of support and understanding from their teachers, Black males continue to be subjected to negative treatment in school. Noguera asserts that

the message is clear: individuals of their race and gender may excel in sports, but not in math or history. The location of Black males within schools – in remedial classes or waiting for punishment outside the principal's office - and the roles they perform within school suggest that they are good at playing basketball or rapping, but debating, writing for the school newspaper, or participating in the science club is strictly out of bounds. Such activities are out of bounds not just because Black males may perceive them as being inconsistent with who they think they are, but also because there simply are not enough examples of individuals who manage to participate in such activities without compromising their sense of self. (Noguera, 2008, p.31)

In other words, Black boys suffer when they do not see and interact with multiple examples of what they consider to be “real men”, or walking counter-narratives. Not having the opportunity “to observationally learn from Black men teachers that they are in fact not intellectually inferior further ingrains [an] anti-intellectual attitude within the psyche of thousands of potential African-American male teachers” (Gibson, 2009, p.16). Walking counter-narratives are crucial to Black male academic success because they are proof that Black boys can learn and that school can be a viable place for them as adults.

Instead, a feminized teaching workforce proves that mainstream education is incompatible with Blacks in America, especially Black boys. Black boys can not identify with the starse lack of critical education and a curriculum designed without them in mind, In fact,

[h]istorically, public schools in the United States have not contributed to the achievement of liberation for African American males or for other minority populations. Rather than serve as vehicles for liberation for African American males and other people of color, public schools serve, at best, as agencies of social, economic, political, and cultural reproduction. (Hopkins, 1997 as cited in Gause 2001, p.27).

Unfortunately, too many schools water down curriculum or lower their standards in order to get rid of their Black male students. Michael Datcher's memoir serves as a great example of this kind of inequitable and incarcerating service to young Black males in schools. Michael's high school teacher, Ms. Green, attempts to limit his potential when she asserts that, "Berkeley is a very challenging university. I think you would be better served by a school that is not quite as difficult.... Maybe...one of the less rigorous Cal State schools" (p.123). Her reaction to his acceptance to the University of California at Berkeley and resulting advice is steeped in prejudice and stereotypes that color her perception of Michael's ability to perform at Berkeley. She actually believed that because she (an affluent white woman) did not do well while enrolled there, that Michael, a poor Black adolescent male, could not if he tried and would be "better served" at an institution that is "less rigorous." Too many American schools are filled with teachers like these who are conditioned to setting low expectations for young Black males because of the stereotypical images that they have of poor Black people (Gause, 2008, p.111). When we are reminded that 85% of teachers of Black children are white and female, we can better understand how "a huge factor in low teacher expectations of Black student is unconscious racism" (Kunjufu, 2011) and sexism – better known as gendered racism.

Gendered racism is the cause of many of the practices that alienate Black boys in school. One such practice is the "adultification" (Ferguson, 2001) of Black males in schools. When discussing the conceptions of young Black males in the schools, Ferguson describes adultification as "a central mechanism in the interpretive framing of gender roles" (p.84) and explains that "...their transgressions are made to take on a

sinister, intentional, fully conscious tone that is stripped of any element of childish naïveté” (p.83). Instead of being seen and treated as children, Black boys are seen by a predominantly white female teaching force as hypersexualized and gravely and unfairly punished for misdeeds as if they are adults who act with full intent. The educational system perpetuates this practice as it is designed to criminalize Black boys and perpetuate the “endangered species” label (Ferguson, 2001; Ford, 2004; Gause, 2008a). This lack of a genuine support system is what leads too many of my brothers to the jailhouse instead of the schoolhouse. Black males are “groomed” for jail as school punishments and labels are designed to stunt the academic growth of Black boys. The Schott Report (2008) also purports that “schools attended mostly by Black students...suspend and expel disproportionately more Black male students than White male students, and assign more Black male students than White male students to special education...” (p.5). As previously mentioned, Black males are removed from the classroom and from school via suspensions and expulsions at an alarming rate. This denial of classroom resources impedes any chance of academic progress. Furthermore, special education labels stigmatize students and foster further disidentification with school and its respective culture. Total disregard for the home/personal cultures that students hold dear (read: lack of value for cultural capital) also fosters disidentification. With so many powerful reasons to not identify with school, why would Black boys dream of growing up to dedicate their lives to the perpetuation of schools’ philosophies?

Discouraging factors and distorted images.

African American men looking to enter the elementary teaching profession are met with a myriad of discouraging factors that stem from the feminization of teaching. One such factor is the preservation of the ideology that because teaching is “women’s work”, it qualifies for low pay and low status. This is what I call the “ideology of K-12 teaching”, which is the overarching belief that (1) women are, by nature, ideal teachers, and (2) because women are domestics, they do not deserve or need much money or power. This ideology has led to several problematic, cultural implications. First, Catharine Beecher’s movement was successful. She convinced America that because women are maternal, they are best suited to teach children. Second, not only is pay not competitive, but teachers are often not financially rewarded for the extra-curricular services and non-instructional duties that they provide like coaching, cheerleading, bus and lunch duty, etc. The salaries set aside for teachers are not suitable to provide for an entire household – regardless if a woman or a man is the head of the household. To think, teaching is a career that requires a MINIMUM of a baccalaureate degree in order to get a job, but because the responsibilities of the job require “caring”, teachers do not even get the privilege of being deemed full-scale professionals. For example, teacher training materials published in the early 1900s called for “unquestioned obedience” as the “first rule of efficient service” (Bagley, 1910 as cited in Darling-Hammond, 1997, p.43) among newly hired teachers. In fact,

[t]he egg-crate school structure headed by a male administrator and staffed by female teachers was established by Boston educator John Philbrick, whose model school contained twelve classrooms built for fifty-six students and one teacher per

classroom. 'Let the Principal or Superintendent have the general supervision and control the whole,' Philbrick advised, 'and let him have one male assistant or sub-principal, and ten female assistants, one for each room' (1856, p.263). This was the start of what Tyack (1974, p.45) called the 'pedagogical harem' and of the subordination of teachers to the directives of those 'above' them. (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p.43)

This model left no room for teachers to exercise their expertise. Instead, they were treated as drones – brainless subordinates. Further, Philbrick assumes that men must lead the way, and women must follow. Consequently, men who are interested in teaching – not administrating – would have to succumb to the idea of becoming a member of “the pedagogical harem” and accepting the low social status that comes with it. Unfortunately, in America, status and respect are often tied to power and income. Teachers do not have much control or power over their day-to-day work activities, and their incomes are fairly low in comparison to salaries earned by other college graduates. The fact that the very people who train, nurture, and educate society’s future leaders (and workers) are looked at as mere servants – the bottom of the barrel – and given little to no respect speaks volumes to why our country continues to cycle into economic, social, and political crisis and to why Black men, in particular, so sparingly join a profession that will not help them transcend class. Those men who do against the grain and become teachers must do the complicated soul balancing work and/or manage an aggregate of gender biases.

That is another way that the feminization of teaching acts as a barrier to prevent Black men from entering the profession: via multiple and competing gender biases. Men who work in elementary and childcare settings are subjected to negative gossip and accusations of being homosexuals, perverts, or pedophiles. The rationale is that since

“[t]he task of comforting students appears to fall into the domain of women teachers” (Sargent, 2001, p. 94), a man who wants to do this for a living must be some kind of deviant. This reason particularly bothers me because I feel that we socialize boys to be and act in a certain manner (i.e., sexually driven, emotionless, macho beings) then ostracize them for being and acting the way that they were socialized to be. Moreover, the concern over the male teacher’s sexuality is unfounded, as sexual orientation does not taint one’s passion for civil service (teaching) nor does it determine one’s professional ability. Yet, what is most disturbing is that much of this stereotyping comes from female teachers. Sargent explains that a

major source of conflict that the men [in this study] face regarding their masculinity is not internal to themselves but resides in the institutionalized expectations that are ambiguous, even contradictory, and force them to teach differently from the women around them. The major task is for me to avoid any accusations of molestation, and the key actors who monitor the men’s activities and who could generate suspicions are *within* the men’s occupational sphere, not outside of it. (p. 99)

Men teachers are vulnerable within this feminized profession and often work hard not to draw much attention to themselves because of the “blatant gender bias” (p. 148) they often face. In addition to being slandered, male teachers are often also taken for granted. One Bronx teacher explains, “I have been asked to carry heavy boxes by female teachers and assigned to extra lunch duty and hall patrol because administrators think male teachers are better at dealing with disciplinary problems” (Helmer, 2005). Sexist practices like these are discouraging to male teachers and serve as another force that keeps the quantity of male teachers low.

The feminization of teaching has done wonders for middle-class white women. It gave these women a place in which they could become professional by doing what they had been socialized to do: nurture and train young children. This may have served a beneficent purpose then – for them - but now, we need much more. This 200 year-old movement does not help minority groups. It, especially, does not help Black boys. Consequently, it does not help Black men. Black boys are alienated in a school system in which the overwhelming majority of the teachers do not look like, think like, act like, or understand them. They are alienated in classrooms in which they feel they are treated unfairly and that their teachers do not like them (Noguera, 2008). These Black boys grow up to be Black men who often do not see school as a safe place or as a viable employment opportunity for them; and if they do choose to join the profession, they are alienated and subjected to unsubstantiated, harmful gender biases. Unless we begin to focus more on “the few”, we will continue to perpetuate a tradition in an educational system that fails because it refuses to embrace all of its stakeholders: students and teachers alike. When we shift our focus to “the few”, African American male teachers, we will no longer ask “real men *or* real teachers?” because we will understand that real men *are* real teachers.

The Influences Of Hip-Hop On Black Male Identity Development: Students And Teachers

Hip-Hop is the Black man’s Negro spiritual. It speaks to the struggles, the aspirations, the challenges, and the shortcomings, all in the same place. In a lot of ways, Hip-Hop has become what the church used to be.... (Mustafa as cited in Bridges, 2009, p. 11)

Hip-Hop was born in 1973 in the Bronx, New York. Inspired by countryside parties in Jamaica (Dimitriadis, May 1996), deejaying, together with emceeing, breakdancing, and graffiti, over the past 30 years, has grown together into the powerful composite we call Hip-Hop. A culture in its own right, Hip-Hop's powerful reach extends to people all over the world. However, its foundation lies within the hearts and souls of young Black men. When Ann Arnett Ferguson began her research for her book *bad boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity*, she learned a powerful lesson that changed how she approached her study on the treatment of Black boys in public schools. Her primary "research assistant", a young Black student named Horace "pointed out that [she] would learn nothing about his peers and himself if [she] didn't listen to their music" (Ferguson, 2001, p. 16). In other words, if you want to learn about Black boys, you must listen to and appreciate Hip-Hop music. The preceding quote from Ferguson helped me to understand the importance of Hip-Hop in the lives of Black boys and men, and I was inspired. This book, Dr. Ferguson, and Horace inspired me. I was inspired to study Black males in schools because there is a crisis affecting black boys in public schools; it presents itself in the forms of skewed numbers of Black boys out of school on suspension and referred for special education services, as well as low high school graduation rates (Ferguson, 2001; Haggerty, 2009; The Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2011; Sundius & Farneth, 2008). In fact, much of the research on black male success in public schools sheds light on the significant achievement gap between black boys and their white counterparts – across the country (Ferguson, 2001; Gause, 2008; Kunjufu, 1985; Noguera, 2008). Hip-Hop is not the answer to all of the

problems Black boys are facing in schools; however, developing an understanding of Hip-Hop and its influences on Black males can help us to understand/rectify this crisis.

The growing body of Hip-Hop scholarship indicates that Hip-Hop has a major influence on Black male identity development (Bridges, 2009; Dimitriadis, 2009; Douglas & Peck, 2013; Dyson, 2001; Hill, 2009a; Irizarry, 2009; Stovall, 2006).

Therefore, my inquiry as a researcher is if Hip-Hop culture influences Black male identities, then what are the implications for specifically exploring the identities of Black male adults/teachers? In this section, I discuss how educational research on Hip-Hop culture provides evidence for a multi-faceted Hip-Hop identity that exists amongst young Black men; discuss what educational researchers say about how Hip-Hop culture influences young Black male identities as they manipulate issues of race, gender, and sociopolitical consciousness/commitments; and discuss the implications of said influence on exploring the identities of Black male adults and teachers as they investigate their own pedagogical awareness.

A multifaceted hip-hop identity.

Some educational researchers purport what they call a singular “Hip-Hop identity” to be present among young Black males. This “identity” is severely influenced by media images that are the result of scrutiny and manipulation followed by commodification. About these images, West (2004) explains,

The incessant media bombardment of images (of salacious bodies and mindless violence) on TV and in movies and music convinces many young people that the culture of gratification - quest for insatiable pleasure, endless titillation, and sexual stimulation – is the only way of being human. (p.175)

Young people take their cues from the media, and these images create a “culture of gratification” that denotes how young people see the world and how they move within it. Hence, the images provide the foundation for a unique form of identity. Gause (2008) explains that “[s]elf-representations of black male youth who construct their identities based on these mediated images rely on definitions of manhood that are deeply dependent on traditional notions of heterosexuality, authenticity, and sexism” (p.44). Though these “mediated images” work to lay a groundwork for identity work, Hip-Hop is far too complex of a concept to be confined to one singular identity. Hence, I posit the presence of a multifaceted identity. Gause (2008) concurs, “Hip-hop is a powerful cultural movement that shapes and forms multiple identities. These identities are performed in various rituals and modes of resistance....” (p.94). I agree, therefore, I have compiled what I believe to be several facets of a Hip-Hop identity. I call these facets “selves”, and based on my research, I have identified five of them. They are the Consumer Self, the Erotic Self, the Authentic Self, the Representin’ Self, and the Socio-Political Self.

The consumer self.

The *Consumer Self* is the first facet of the Hip-Hop identity that I discuss in this section. In her article “Creating Public Fictions: The Black Man as Producer and Consumer,” Jordanna Matlon (2010) describes Hip-Hop masculinity as a “consumer-based identity”. Through this identity, she explains that Black men find a way “to affirm themselves in a society as well as allow them to reconnect to an economic system of which they are no longer a part” (p.37). Matlon explains that Black men have been bypassed as producers and dislocated from the economy. She asserts, “Cut off from

capitalism as producers, popular Hip-Hop culture's celebration of consumption – once the woman's terrain within the traditional capitalist gender divisions – provides a new way for black men to be incorporated" (p.40). In other words, instead of being producers (gendered masculine), Matlon asserts that Black men are emasculated and forced to take on the consumer (gendered feminine) self. For Matlon, "focusing on a consumption-oriented identity *may* enable marginal black American men to belong to a system that has excluded them as producers" (p.39, emphasis mine). In America, being "the best" is equivalent to being wealthy and powerful. What Matlon deems the "celebration of consumption" can also be understood as bragging and boasting about one's monetary and material possessions, and this has long been an integral part of Hip-Hop and Black urban culture. In fact, Peters (2007) writes, "In preparation for expected encounters with racism, ...mothers...felt that it was necessary to develop high self-esteem and self-confidence in their children" (Peters, 2007, p. 213). Moreover, having "money to blow" (Graham, et.al., 2009) is possible because of "grindin'" (Clipse, 2002) (working hard and often to make money, even if by illegal means), not easy acquisition. In other words, on the one hand, the over-exaggeration and boisterous consumptive attitudes that we see in Hip-Hop culture can be seen as one result of this in-home preparation for the real world. On the other hand, it can also be seen as Black youth embracing "their own commodification, basking under the corporate marketer's loving gaze, believing themselves to be powerful and autonomous" (Ford G. , 2002). The activation of the Consumer Self interrogates and problematizes the impact of the media on the role of Black men within a capitalist society as well as the commodification of the Black male

body. Though there is validity in Matlon's findings, she presents the "consumer identity" as the only aspect of a limited Hip-Hop identity. The Consumer Self is the aspect of a multifaceted Hip-Hop identity that navigates the consumer world and monitors one's role within said world.

The erotic self.

The *Erotic Self* is the second of the selves to compose a Hip-Hop identity. With the erotic self, we see the expression of eros, in the forms of passion and sexuality, through the lens of Hip-Hoppers. Jack Morin (1995) defines eroticism as "the multifaceted process through which our innate capacity for arousal is shaped, focused, suppressed, and expressed" (p.3). bell hooks writes about eros as it relates to Black men and as it relates to the classroom. When it comes to Black men and love, she explains that American culture is one "that does not love black males....Black males in the culture of imperialistic white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy are feared but they are not loved" (hooks, 2004, pp. xi-xii). In turn, it is difficult for Black men to fully express love, passion, and compassion for themselves and others. American culture barely tolerates Black men in the elementary classroom. The barriers, in the form of alienation and stereotyping, serve to limit, not only the quantity of Black men who become teachers of young children, but said barriers also to block Black men's erotic expression, in the forms of love, passion, and compassion, as it relates to their students. This is evident in Hip-Hop music and in the actions of many Black male youth. Rapper Ice T explains how many see crime through the lens of the erotic self. He explains that "there's definitely something sexy about crime.... It takes a lot of courage to fuck the system" (as cited in

hooks, 2004, p.28). There is an erotic relationship with crime that is translated and expressed throughout Hip-Hop culture. Therefore, the expression of passion is somewhat feared, highly valued, and highly guarded. The emission of passion in some circles equates to weakness. Therefore, this aspect of the erotic self is often under intense protective guard.

The other aspect of the erotic self is sexuality. In his 2009 article, “Scared Straight: Hip-Hop, Outing, and the Pedagogy of Queerness”, Marc Lamont Hill discusses sexuality within the Hip-Hop world with a focus on homophobia. In fact, he shares that “[t]he threat of outing, or publicly exposing a person’s non-heterosexual identity, has facilitated the development of a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ climate within Hip-Hop culture” (p.30). This “don’t ask, don’t tell” ideology creates a climate in which the erotic self – if not clearly heterosexual - is severely suppressed for fear of being ostracized or labeled as a “homothug.” The term, homothug, “refers to a gay or bisexual male who identifies with the hypermasculine accoutrements of mainstream Hip-Hop” (p.46). The homothug concept of the erotic self provides evidence that Hip-Hop culture is, at its root, “incompatible with queer identity” (p.47). This, in turn, often leads to a form of a “fractured masculinity” because “male MCs whose sexual identity is questioned are subjected to forms of marginalization and abuse that alienate them from the mainstream Hip-Hop community” (p.31). Many young Black men learn this important lesson from the media and rap artists and use it to inform their notions of sexual identity and romantic relationships. The media provides a surplus of lessons for young Black men to learn how to be. Furthermore, many rap artists take their cues from the media in an effort to give

the people what the media has indicated the people want. In his 2009 text, *Performing Identity/ Performing Culture: Hip-Hop as Text, Pedagogy, and Lived Practice*, Greg Dimitriadis quoted one of the teen-aged African American men in his study: “Rap music, they tell you how to pimp and play [women]” (p.90). The young men in Dimitriadis’ study drew various cues from rap music, specifically Southern rap, on how to perform sexuality and maneuver within relationships with the opposite sex. Hence, the indication here is that there is no space for a young Black man whose erotic self does not express heterosexuality and hypersexuality.

The authentic self.

This leads me to the aspect of the Hip-Hop identity that is concerned with “keepin’ it real.” The third facet of a Hip-Hop identity is the *Authentic Self*. Hill (2009b) explains that in Hip-Hop culture, there is an

obsession with ‘realness,’ or the belief in a one-to-one relationship between what one says and what one does. This framework not only demands congruence between artistic expression and lived experience but also privileges a particular set of experiences that are deemed appropriate within the culture. (p. 48)

Though there is this “obsession with realness,” Hip-Hop culture is sexualized as heterosexual. Hence, the Authentic Self is the facet that interrogates, controls, and perhaps, even ostracizes the Erotic Self if it is out of line with mainstream Hip-Hop values (hypermasculine heterosexuality). As a matter of fact, “[t]hrough the rubric of realness, this perspective of the homothug is positioned as a poser whose ‘true’ self not only violates Hip-Hop culture’s code of compulsory heterosexuality, but also contradicts its shibboleth of ‘keeping it real’” (p.48). However, Hip-Hop is not only sexualized as

heterosexual, but it is also racialized as Black. This was apparent during Hill's study at Twilight High School. He wrote, "students of all races frequently referred to Hip-Hop Lit as the 'Black people class' or, among the Black students, simply 'our class'" (Hill, 2009a, p. 49). Authenticity was of major importance for Hill's "Hip-Hop Heads" (p.31) as they considered Hip-Hop to be "an authentic product of Black culture" and used Hip-Hop as a measure of their own identity. Stovall (2006) defines Hip-Hop "heads" as "those who disapproved of rap music's infusion into mainstream culture and listened only to music in the underground Hip-Hop category" (p.591). Hip-Hop heads are especially critical of artists whom they believe are not "keeping it real"; artists accused of demonstrating a lack of "congruence between artistic expression and lived experience" are labeled as phony and not given much respect. In Hip-Hop culture, authenticity is crucial.

The representin' self.

Not to be confused with the *Authentic Self*, the fourth facet that I discuss is what I call the *Representin' Self*. The *Representin' Self* is activated when one thinks about how "insiders represent themselves and hold themselves accountable to other members of the communities they represent" (Irizarry, 2009, p. 497). Jason G. Irizarry (2009) discussed the concept of "representation" as "a central theme in Hip-Hop/urban discourse" in his article, "Representin': Drawing from Hip-Hop and Urban Youth Culture to Inform Teacher Education" (p.494). He explains that "representin'... refers to actions carried out by individuals with knowledge and pride in the fact that they reflect the various socially constructed communities of which they might be members" (p.494).

Representin' embodies a fluid kind of affiliation among multiple identities that often involves ties to multiple communities (or "microgroups") (p.498). Irizarry explains that Hip-Hop's "influence on the lives of urban youth is pervasive" (p.494). Being born of Black youth, Hip-Hop's influence on Black youth identity development is positively symbiotic; the two are mutually influential. As they develop their identities, young Black men often look to rappers for examples of how to represent. Therefore, many rappers' "investment in these communities is not necessarily monetary or proprietary but rather reflects a shared identity with other people living in a particular locale" (p.497). One of Hill's (2009a) teen-aged participants eagerly explains, "when Freeway and Beans and them be rapping about my hood I know the whole world gonna know about the shit that I go through" (p. 41). These teens invest in Hip-Hop because the artists "represent" for them, making these young men feel like they are not only a real part of the larger society but also that "the whole world" will *understand* what they are going through. Dimitriadis (2009) offers additional conclusions from a study he conducted on how two male African American teen-agers (Rufus and Tony) constructed and performed identity. These young men found a sense of stability and comfort with Hip-Hop because Southern rap promoted a form of "egalitarian ethic" (p87), meaning a sense of representing for your neighborhood, spreading the word about what's going on in your neighborhood, and supporting those from your neighborhood *because* they are from your neighborhood. Dimitriadis explains that "some artists don't sustain this egalitarian ethic and are the focus of negative criticism.... Rufus saw certain kinds of allegiances in the 'crew system' of Southern rap and prized them" (p.88). Rufus and Tony saw the themes available in

Southern rap as valuable and used them to gain insight on much more than just their relationships with women, but they utilized these themes to cultivate their perspectives about trust, day-to-day survival, and relationships within their cliques.

The socio-political self.

The fifth and final facet of the Hip-Hop identity is the *Socio-Political Self*. This aspect of the Hip-Hop identity is seen through a commitment to social and political issues as well as a particular consciousness and awareness of how race, class, gender, and sexuality impact our daily living. This social consciousness has been a major part of Hip-Hop since its inception. Cornel West asserts the following:

[O]ur kids today see clearly the hypocrisies and mendacities of our society, and as they grow up they begin to question in a fundamental way some of the lies that they've received from society. They also begin to see that their education has been distorted and sugarcoated and has sidestepped so many uncomfortable truths. This often leads to an ardent disappointment, and even anger, about the failures of our society to consistently uphold the democratic and humanitarian values that can be born in youths in this phase of their life. This new sense of conscience in young people is a profound force that adult society should take much more seriously. (West, 2004, pp. 177-178)

This “ardent disappointment” and “anger” contribute to the disposition of the Socio-Political Self and to a strong overall Hip-Hop identity. West explains that “[t]he disaffection of so many youths stems in large part from their perception that the adult community neither understands nor cares about the issues in their lives” (p.186). This disaffection is apparent in many rap songs (“You Must Learn” by KRS-One; “Fight the Power” by Public Enemy; “Mr. Wendal” by Arrested Development; “They Schoolz” by

Dead Prez, to name a few). For example, one version of KRS-One's song "You Must Learn" begins with the following dialogue:

McBoo: Yo Chris, what you doing out of school?

KRS-One: Yo, they just suspended me, McBoo.

McBoo: Word? They suspended The Teacha?

KRS-One: Yeah man, I'm getting' so sick of this man. They teachin' us about nothing, man! You know what the bottom line is for Black people out here. It's quite simple; YOU MUST LEARN! (Parker, 1989)

KRS-One is known in the Hip-Hop community as "The Teacha" because he consistently promotes a humanistic, liberating philosophy that includes life-long learning and the seeking of knowledge of self; and this short excerpt from this song provides a powerfully relevant example of how young people had begun "to see that their education has been distorted and sugarcoated and has sidestepped so many uncomfortable truths." Rappers', like KRS-One, interrogation of issues of race and class is evidence that Hip-Hop is a form of critical pedagogy and is part of the strong influence that Hip-Hop has on identity formation.

The symbiotic relationship between black males and hip-hop.

The five selves identified work together as one Hip-Hop identity that is directly influenced by an evolving Hip-Hop culture that is a microcosm of American society. As such, Hip-Hop culture influences Black male identities as these youth manipulate issues of race, gender, and sociopolitical consciousness/commitments. First, I must clarify that race and gender cannot be separated as they are intersecting aspects of the human condition. Athena D. Mutua (2006) explains that black men are "oppressed by gendered racism" because they "are not only oppressed by racism but that their oppression is

gendered” and argues “for a multidimensional understanding of black men” (p.5).

Therefore, I discuss these two terms together in order to respect their intersection. When I think of the intersection of race and gender in Hip-Hop, I immediately think of Public Enemy’s 1988 “Don’t Believe the Hype”:

They claim that I'm a criminal/ By now I wonder how
Some people never know/ The enemy could be their friend, guardian
I'm not a hooligan/ I rock the party and/ Clear all the madness, I'm not a racist
Preach to teach to all/ 'Cause some they never had this/ Number one, not born to
run
About the gun/ I wasn't licensed to have one/ The minute they see me, fear me
I'm the epitome - a public enemy/ Used, abused without clues
I refused to blow a fuse/ They even had it on the news/ Don't believe the hype!
(Ridenhour, 1988)

These lyrics illustrate the pain and frustration felt by a young Black man whose only intentions are to educate and entertain others; however, negative assumptions of his intentions are sensationalized by the media, causing ideologies to precede his actions, making him (as a Black man) a “public enemy” without any just cause. This is also indicative of the struggle that goes on within the minds of some Black males as they try to manipulate their roles in society.

In his 2009 dissertation, Thurman Bridges interviewed Black men teachers who were born part of the Hip-Hop generation (1965-1984). Bridges asserts that as Black males attempt to figure out their roles in society, they often look to Hip-Hop artists for guidance. He writes:

artists like 2Pac [sic], Scarface, Outkast, Tribe Called Quest, KRS-One, The Roots, M&M [sic], Common, and Mos Def are examples of Hip-Hop artists who functioned as positive role models throughout Chuck’s life because they made

‘thoughtful Hip-Hop’ that talked about real issues facing people of color in marginalized communities. (p.89)

It is key to note that these rap artists serve as role models to Chuck because how they “represented.” They *talked about real issues facing people like Chuck – people of color in marginalized communities*. Moreover, Hip-Hop influenced his socio-political awareness:

Hip-Hop culture played a significant role in Chuck’s identity as a black male.... [I]n terms of being an African American man, Hip-Hop artist Rakim and 2Pac were pivotal figures in his development because they were close in age and spoke about socio-political subjects in ways that made sense to him. (p.87)

The messages available to him in Hip-Hop music influenced Chuck holistically and helped him to understand and develop opinions about the socio-political world around him. Because he could “see his life experiences expressed directly through Hip-Hop music” (p.88), Chuck felt a special, familial connection with Hip-Hop. About Chuck, Bridges explains, “Hip-Hop became a cousin, uncle, or older brother, who was able to answer questions and guide him through life in ways that his mother could not.” (p.89). In other words, Hip-Hop’s influence on his life came in the form of “otherfathering.” Hunter, et.al (2006) explains that “otherfathers in Black communities...are important for the development of children and youth – particularly for males without fathers in their lives (Anderson, 1990, 1999, Stack, 1974)” (p.439). Hip-Hop as a culture is an otherfather because it provides mentoring and assists and guides “boys in their transition to respectable manhood” (p.439). This otherfathering is a powerful demonstration of the symbiotic relationship between Black males and Hip-Hop.

Black men teachers and hip-hop.

Though this positively symbiotic relationship between Hip-Hop and Black males is apparent to most, it is not always understood or appreciated. Gause (2008) quotes one of the teachers in his study, Crystal. She explains,

They [her Black male high school students] eat, sleep, and breathe rap music and Hip-Hop. It's like a religion, in fact, for some of them I believe it is their religion. They have their rituals, their icons, their own language, and they treat those 'rappers' like they're gods. They see what they believe and believe what they see. (p.99)

Though I do not see Hip-Hop as a "religion" per se, I do see how Crystal could misconstrue her students' reliance on Hip-Hop artists to show them the right things to do and say as treating them "like they're gods." Black youth depend on Hip-Hop artists not only for mentoring and guidance but also to amplify their voices. Land and Stovall (2009) assert this idea:

[s]ince its inception, Hip-Hop has been and continues to be a constructive and contested space for the historically oppressed and marginalized to both resist and challenge social ideologies, practices, and structures that have caused and maintained their subordinate position. These silenced voices creatively and strategically utilized Hip-Hop as a vehicle to showcase their views and experiences to the world regarding the social, political, and economic barriers that limit and often prohibit access to resources for social advancement. (p. 1)

Black male students do not think rappers are gods; they revere them for speaking out against oppression and for social advancement. The lyrics in rap music are most often "[c]ounternarratives[, which] are theories and empirical accounts of lived experiences that offer insight into the reality, victories and challenges of marginalized people...."

(Cooper & McCoy, 2009). Hence, as Ann Arnett Ferguson (2001) studied her Hip-Hop lessons (at Horace's behest), she realized that

[r]ather than the stigmatized figure of the criminal feared by members of society, the gangster in rap music and videos was a heroic medium for articulating the tragic realities of urban poverty as well as the dangers, pleasures, and privileges of being male. (p.16)

It wasn't until she opened her heart and mind to truly understand Black boys' fascination with Hip-Hop that she was able to see – and feel – that Black boys were so invested in rap music because *their* stories are being told. Hip-Hop is a part of the Black male identity and affects how boys and men think and behave and with what they identify.

The relationship between Black boys and Hip-Hop does not dissipate as these boys become men. On the contrary, Hip-Hop continues to influence Black male identity development. In fact, research shows that many Black men from the Hip-Hop generation continue to depend on Hip-Hop as an otherfather and invite “Hip-Hop artists as surrogate teachers” (Hill Collins, 2007 as cited in Bridges, 2009, p.12). In his 2006 article “We Can Relate: Hip-Hop Culture, Critical Pedagogy, and the Secondary Classroom,” David Stovall writes that it is crucial that we “locate Hip-Hop as a transformative element in the development of critical teaching and thinking” (Stovall, 2006, p. 585). The idea of Hip-Hop as a “transformative element” is powerful. To think, that this merely forty-year-old culture has such power is intriguing to me. Stovall also explained that the

infusion of Hip-Hop culture can provide the context for students to develop a critical lens in approaching subject matter and its relevance to their daily lives. Hip-Hop culture, as relevant to the lives of many high school students, can provide a bridge to ideas and tasks that promote critical understanding. (p.589)

Stovall uses Hip-Hop as a way to engage his students in stories that are often left out of the history books, and he uses songs “to provide historical and social context” (p.587).

As the first generation to be reared in racially integrated America, members of the Hip-Hop generation are unique because of their

experiences as the benefactors of the Civil Right movement as well as the victims of racist social policies that eroded the gains of that movement, provide a critical analyses of racialized oppression and exhibit a commitment to manifesting positive change in urban communities while transforming urban schools in ways that nurture African American and Latino intellectuals. (Bridges, 2009, p. 50)

Consequently, many of the Black men teachers from this generation rely on the critique and resistance found within Hip-Hop culture to expose racist practices within public school systems, law enforcement, and the broader legal system (Kitwana, 2002). There is an interesting brand of activism present among these Black men teachers. These men critique the negative images within Hip-Hop. However, they are also committed to embracing Hip-Hop’s positive images and using them to empower students to develop strong identities so that they may purposefully resist pervasive racism. Another powerful example of this is the Hip-Hop Lit class that Marc Lamont Hill conducted at study at Twilight High School. As a Black man teacher born during the Hip-Hop generation, Hill sees power in the ardent interrogation of Hip-Hop music and lyrics as a way to help his students develop “the ability to read and write in a manner that allows one to de-center dominant (hegemonic) conceptions of reality and relocate specific experiences, values, and codes of the hip-hop community from the periphery to the center” (Hill, 2009a, p. 18). In his classes, students are taught to read the lyrics of Hip-Hop songs as printed

texts (not necessarily poetry) and to examine these texts for specific literary devices and universal themes. Black men teachers like Hill often help to reshape the literary canon (from Melville to Mos Def) and transform students into more critical readers, thinkers, and consumers – redefining how Black males are impacted by Hip-Hop.

The relationship between Hip-Hop and Black males is powerfully symbiotic. They influence each other, and they depend on each other. Black males were among the pioneers of Hip-Hop and have helped to develop it into the world culture that it is today. Furthermore, Hip-Hop still stands as the loudest voice for young Black men in America today. The multifaceted Hip-Hop identity is pervasive and evolving, and it will continue to evolve as Hip-Hop continues to develop and change. But why is it important to know about this connection between Black males and Hip-Hop? This connection is important because Black men interrogate societal norms, expectations, and political landscapes through Hip-Hop. They have used Hip-Hop as their platform since 1973, and Black males who are not doing the speaking rely on those who are doing the speaking. Furthermore, Hip-Hop and Black males exist as like entities. Thurman Bridges asserts,

[m]y participants articulated that their transformative pedagogies were motivated by a mutual love of Hip-Hop culture and their African American male students, both of which have been represented in negatively imbalanced ways in mainstream U.S. society. (p. 227)

It is much more than just having something in common. Because both, Hip-Hop and Black males, have been poorly treated and subjected to multiple and competing forms of prejudice, it is as if they are kindred spirits. Hip-Hop gives Black males something of which they can be a complete, whole part, without having to apologize for being Black or

for being male. Black males keep Hip-Hop raw and fresh and in the forefront of American politics and social issues. Hip-Hop has relevance for many young Black males, and it should be used in the schools not only as a tool of engagement but also as a source of content. There is a lot that we can learn by studying Hip-Hop culture: how to become critical thinkers, how to make good and bad choices, how to actively resist unjust laws and policies, how to become independent business owners. These are just a few of the lessons that we all can get from Hip-Hop – not just Black males.

Theoretical Framework

The Intersection Of Critical Race Theory And Black Feminist Theory

being alive & being a woman & bein colored is a metaphysical dilemma/I haven't conquered yet/do you see the point my spirit is too ancient to understand the separation of soul & gender. (Shange, 1989, p.261)

In the preceding epigraph from Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*, the Lady in Yellow speaks of the web of intersecting identities in which Black women are caught and often find themselves struggling to escape. For the Lady in Yellow, her humanity, her gender, and her race are intersecting identities – all of equal importance. Their intersection is so powerfully inseparable that it causes somewhat of a dilemma for her because she cannot figure out how to conquer, or manage, said intersection. However, she concedes that this dilemma is incomprehensible because her soul and her gender have always been intertwined. Hence, there is almost no telling them apart, for each individual strand of her being is too much a part of her natural wholeness as a human to separate (or to choose one over the

other). In 1989, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw identified this inner struggle as intersectionality. She explains that

[i]ntersectional theory challenges a single-axis framework for understanding Black women's oppression. The single-axis framework suggested that Black women were either oppressed by race or were oppressed because of gender and did not account for Black women's oppression structured by both sexism and racism. (Mutua, 2006, p. 21)

The race versus gender argument is a complicated issue: one that I have dealt with my entire life and grappled with ever since I publicly declared myself a Black feminist whose research is focused on Black men teachers. Therefore, in this section, I define Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Feminist Theory as components of my theoretical framework; and I discuss why I utilized a critical race methodology informed by an Afrocentric Feminist Methodology and a Hip-Hop Feminist Epistemology using counter-storytelling to collect the narratives of Black men elementary school teachers.

My theoretical position is situated in part within Critical Race Theory because I recognize race as a central component of my being. Growing up in New York City, I always “knew” that White people lived in one part of town while Black people lived in another, and even though it was alright for us to intermingle every now and then in school or at work, I “knew” that I better not get too close to them. This “knowing” is situated within an ideology centered on race and racism. Johnson (2006) describes this ideology:

African Americans, for example, have to pay close attention to whites and white culture and get to know them well enough to avoid displeasing them, since whites control jobs, schools, government, the police, and most resources and sources of

power. White privilege gives whites little reason to pay attention to African Americans or to how white privilege affects them. (p. 22)

I was raised with the understanding that Whites have this power, and Blacks are constant victims of this power and oppression. In other words, I grew up with a clear understanding that race is endemic in America – one of the tenets of Critical Race Theory. Solórzano & Yosso (2002) explicate five elements of CRT:

1. “The intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination” [racism is endemic in America];
2. “The challenge to dominant ideology” [contestations of traditional claims of objectivity, colorblindness, equal opportunity, etc.];
3. “The commitment to social justice” [“liberatory or transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression”];
4. “The centrality of experiential knowledge” [the legitimacy of lived experience]; and
5. “The transdisciplinary perspective” [respect for and reliance on other academic fields to better understand oppression]. (pp.25-26)

Derrick Bell (1992) is credited as being the architect of critical race theory. An outgrowth of Critical Legal Studies, CRT began as a legal framework for interrogating and challenging racist practices and policies in America. Ten years later, the parameters of CRT were expanded to encompass how we critique the American education system. As applied to education, CRT can be defined as

a framework or set of basic insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom. (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 25)

What I have come to realize is that I was a critical race theorist long before I knew what CRT was. I say this because it has always been my goal as an educator to prepare children to transcend their current social class and transform the “structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom” by becoming critical, liberated thinkers. I recognize the barriers facing people of color as they maneuver through an evolving society and the sifting, sorting, and stratifying process that is the American education system, I am committed to challenging and working against it.

Just as society evolves, so does CRT. Lynn & Parker (2006) write about a “New CRT” in which “a second-generation of scholars have taken Bell, Delgado, Williams, and Crenshaw’s ideas and extended them to address issues of gender, ethnicity, language, culture, sexuality, and other key markers of difference” (p. 262). This new perspective of CRT is more inclusive as it interrogates the human experience more holistically. By including more than race as a “key marker of difference,” CRT is expanded and can be more widely used as a tool to deconstruct oppression. For example, Howard (2008) uses CRT as a conceptual framework to interrogate the underachievement and disenfranchisement of African American males in PreK-12 schools. He writes, “CRT is a lens that enables a discourse about race, class, and gender to be the centerpiece for an analysis of African American male underachievement” (p. 956). Like Howard, I am

concerned about the gross underachievement and disenfranchisement of Black boys in public schools across America. The flagrant gender and racial disparities in the numbers of Black boys in special education and out of school on suspension is at crisis level (Gause, 2008; Gibson, 2009; Howard, 2008; Kunjufu, 2011; The Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2011). Furthermore, Black boys are dropping out of high school at alarming rates. Several major cities across the country graduate less than half of their Black male students (The Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2011). Even further, Howard (2008) also explains that

race still remains one of the least understood, yet most provocative and divisive elements of our society.... Our failure to honestly and critically examine race and all of its manifestations in many ways has only led to further tension, discrimination, and hostility along racial lines. (p. 960)

Therefore, CRT is needed as one way to provide not only a critical analysis of race but also a critical analysis of how race intersects with gender and class and how that intersection impacts American schooling. As one of the unifying themes of critical race theory is its interdisciplinarity, it is natural for me to make the connection between CRT and Black Feminist Theory because these theories overlap in their critical examination of intersecting identities.

Shawn Arango Ricks (2011) asserts that “Black Feminist Thought realizes the importance of celebrating, owning and sharing the talents of groups that have been historically ignored” (p. 62). For me, Black Feminism is not solely a struggle for the rights of women; it is a way of uncovering how the human body is affected by power. It is the fight against said power and for the needs of those affected bodies, or groups of

people, who “have been historically ignored.” Black Feminism can not only be a women’s issue because the body is not only gendered; it is also racialized. These two factors (along with sexual orientation, religious preference, etc.) color how one sees the world. Furthermore, though Black women may look through a similar lens, all Black feminists do not have the same perspectives. Villaverde (2008) cautions:

Feminism is about locating yourself, about creating your agency through theorizing, not about any one act, thought, struggle, or lens of gender, race, ethnicity, class, or sexual expression. Identity politics and power are much more complex and organic than the forms we commonly employ, so I propose we resist the inclination to fit into neat social categories and the assumed inherent consciousness these afford. Instead, let us engage in the search for meaning not in certainty but in ambiguity.... (p.10)

In other words, the struggles and interests of all feminists are unique. Black feminists are no different, and this section is about me – *my* search for meaning in ambiguity. My work as a Black feminist cannot be contained in a “neat social” category. I am concerned for Black boys and men because their gender, compacted by their race, marginalizes them in a school system in which the majority of teachers are white, middle-class women (Bridges, 2009). This lack of cultural congruence causes an imbalance in American schools as Black boys struggle for academic, cultural, and emotional survival and equitable treatment in educational, political, and social settings (Gause, 2008; Gibson, 2009; Kunjufu, 1985); this spurns my desire to study this topic.

In other words, I have an agenda; this work is personal. I watched my brother, Greg, struggle in school – as he tried to navigate the educational system’s frequent suspensions and special education referrals with a very loose, somewhat non-existent

support system. I write mostly for him. However, when I became an elementary school teacher in Brooklyn, New York, I further witnessed firsthand how Black boys were overrepresented in the dean's office. Most teachers struggled with them; I struggled with them. Yet I was intrigued – concerned for the light that I saw inside them that seemed to go unnoticed by most others. Therefore, Black boys like Chris are another reason why I write.

Even though I could show Chris all of the love in the world, I could feel in my bones that he also needed a male walking counter-narrative in his life. Perhaps, if my brother had had a strong, caring, and supportive male presence in school (as he did not have a male of this sort at home), then he would have graduated from high school. Perhaps, if my cousins Dante and Sam had had good Black men teachers, they would not have dropped out of high school. Now, it is not my intention to essentialize Black masculinity and completely bank all Black male academic progress on the presence of Black male role models. My intention is, however, to express my belief that these consistent, positive interactions *can* improve academic success and make schooling a more equitable, productive experience for all students, especially Black boys.

Throughout my 13 years of experience as a public school teacher and as a teacher trainer, I have known two Black male elementary school (classroom) teachers. And I can't help but wonder about the connection between the skewed numbers of Black boys in special education and out-of-school suspension and the low number of Black men teachers, especially in the elementary schools. This wondering compelled me to want to talk to those men who did not drop out of school. I wanted to know what inspired them

to become teachers. I wanted to know why, in spite of the stigma associated with the profession, they decided to work with children. I see the effects that this lack of a positive Black male presence during early and adolescent development has on boys. I am very much interested in Black male academic success; consequently, I have decided to study Black men teachers (instead of students) because I believe that Black men teachers can serve as walking counter-narratives for the boys they teach and with whom they interact on a daily basis. Furthermore, more research is needed to add to the scholarship on Black men teachers, and my goal is to contribute to this body of knowledge. When I speak from my personal perspective and honor my subjectivities, I recognize myself as a warrior who has something to add to the discourse on a Black feminism that is driven by the ideology that no oppressions fall outside of the humanist project.

This humanist project is a blend of critical race and Black feminist theories; furthermore, the project lends itself to my personal interpretation of feminism as a Black woman in America. I am a human being concerned with social justice issues affecting other human beings. In her chapter, “Beyond Competitive Victimhood: Abandoning Arguments that Black Women or Black Men Are Worse Off” (2006), Stephanie L. Phillips writes,

...Black feminism should be considered a subdivision of humanism, for ‘Black women’s struggles are part of a wider struggle for human dignity and empowerment.’ Even though the core agenda of Black feminism may not encompass all forms of oppression, none fall outside the humanist commitments of Black feminist thought. (223)

The idea that no forms of oppression fall outside of “the humanist commitments of Black feminist thought” is extremely powerful. Because gender and race are intersecting identities, I cannot ignore the issues facing Black boys and men today, especially when it comes to education. Some may say that these issues do not directly affect me, but I disagree: I have a father, a brother, a husband, a nephew, numerous cousins, and friends ... who are all Black males. And even if I did not have these close relations with these Black men, these serious discrepancies would still absolutely concern me. The extreme gender imbalance in the teaching force is one consequence of these inequities. It’s just a matter of fact: if Black boys do not graduate from high school (or earn a GED), then they cannot graduate from college. If they do not graduate from college, then they cannot become teachers.

Phillips clarifies and supports my stance as a Black feminist concerned about the issues facing Black males in America today:

Black feminists are concerned about issues that do not directly affect Black women and ... will not always insist that the interests of Black women be given priority, when those interests conflict with other important projects (223).

This crisis affecting Black boys is an “important project” for me. Furthermore, these concerns are not based on mere emotion or happenstance. In her chapter “Gender Justice: Linking Women’s Human Rights and Progressive Black Masculinities” (2006), M. Bahati Kuumba expresses that “[i]t is evident, based on the Black feminist analysis of interlocking and multiple oppressions, that Black women have a *vested interest* in transforming oppressive Black expressions of manhood” (p.238, emphasis mine). This

vested interest can manifest itself in a myriad of ways. As a Black woman committed to a humanist project, I seek balance in my social, educational, and political arenas. I believe that developing a critical awareness of the skewed numbers of Black boys who are in special education and on out-of-school suspension is a crucial first step on the path to achieving some sort of balance. A balanced humanity is whole, meaning it is not skewed in favor of one group over the other. Achieving power via a pendulum swing is not balance. We do not need a school system (or a society, for that matter) that is run completely by women to make things right in the world. I do not commit myself only to issues affecting women because women are not the only people in pain right now; we are not the only ones dealing with a “metaphysical dilemma”. And I have a vested interest “in transforming oppressive Black expressions of manhood” because these causes are not conflicting. I support Black boys and men in educational, social, and political settings because they also suffer from a composite of oppressions. McCready (2010) further explains that intersectional theorizing is essential because

it shifts the entire analytical focus from an ‘additive’ approach that ‘prioritize(s) one form of oppression as primary and then handles remaining types of oppression as variables within what is seen as the most important system’ (Collins, 2000, p.20) to explaining the links among multiple systems of oppression. (McCready, 2010, p. 7)

Black men and women share multiple systems of oppression. Some say that Black women are oppressed by racism *and* gender because of America’s racist, patriarchal ideologies and institutions. But others say that though Black women are oppressed by racism, they are in fact *privileged by gender* because they are often allowed to move

within white circles in order to collude with white men “to the detriment of Black men” (Phillips, 2006, p.217). On the other hand, some say that Black men are oppressed by racism but *privileged by gender* because they are men and that their early admittance to the franchise demonstrates this (Newman, 1999). However, others would say that Black men are *oppressed by “gendered racism”* because they “are not only oppressed by racism but that their oppression is gendered” (Mutua, 2006, p.5). In other words, the application of intersectional theory to Black male and Black female experiences requires one to take notice of the context of a particular situation as a way of determining whether Black men and Black women are being privileged or oppressed by gender or by any other intersecting identity. Context matters, and the gender versus race argument is a very complicated issue.

Summary

There are several theories that inform my thinking about Black men teachers and Hip-Hop. The first is critical theory. Using critical theory, I analyze the work of scholars such as Maxine Greene (1988; 1991), Henry Giroux (2009), H. Svi Shapiro (2006; 2009), and Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade and Ernest Morell (2008) to examine the role that American schools play in the maltreatment and misfortune of Black males through a process of sorting and stratification. The second concept that I review is the feminization of teaching. To do this, I cite the writings of Paul Sargent (2001), Bryan Nelson (2002), Joseph R. Gibson (2009), C.P. Gause (2001; 2008), Joel Spring (2005), and Ann Arnett Ferguson (2001). I probe into the causes and effects of the feminization of teaching as another avenue to reinforce the present state of Black males in American schools through

the alienation of Black males in several ways. Third, I explore the work of Hip-Hop educational researchers such as Thurman Bridges (2009), Marc Lamont Hill (2009a; 2009b), David Stovall (2006), Greg Dimitriadis (1996; 2009), and Cornell West (2004). Furthermore, I theorize Hip-Hop as a multi-faceted identity that is fluid and powerful. Finally, I situate my theoretical position between critical race and Black feminist theories in order to dictate a research methodology that best helped me to learn about Black men teachers from the Hip-Hop generation. In order to do this, I reference the work of scholars such as Derrick Bell (1992), Solorzano & Yosso (2002), Marvin Lynn (2001; 2004; 2006), Tyrone C. Howard (2000; 2008; 2011), and Stephanie Phillips (2006).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

My Epistemology

An epistemology surmises certain ideas about knowledge: “what can be known, and through what methods it can be known” (Villaverde, 2008, p. 107). According to Villaverde, an epistemology shapes “the way research is designed, implemented, and articulated” (p.107). Therefore, I find it necessary to discuss my personal epistemological orientation. As an epistemology is a way of knowing, I believe an epistemology is founded in one’s cultural scripts. Cultural scripts are

descriptions of commonly held assumptions about how "people think" about social interaction. Because people bring these assumptions with them into everyday interactions, cultural scripts influence the form taken by particular verbal encounters.... [T]he scripts form a kind of interpretive background against which individuals position their own acts and those of others. (Thorsteinsson, 2010)

How I come to know, understand, and interpret the world is, in large part, informed by my environment and lived experiences. Consequently, my epistemology is informed by two intersecting epistemologies that encompass a gendered understanding: an Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology and a Hip-Hop Feminist Epistemology. These two particular ways of knowing embody how I approached my research. The first is, in part, an Afrocentric Feminist

Epistemology - a way of knowing that Patricia Hill Collins (2003) deems as being particular to a Black woman's standpoint.

Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology

While in her 2003 article, "Toward an Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology", Collins outlines four dimensions of this way of understanding and knowing, I elaborate on the first two dimensions only, for these two dimensions speak to me most. The first dimension is that there are "two types of knowing – knowledge and wisdom" (p. 54). Knowledge is what is commonly known in the African-American community as "book smarts", while wisdom is what is gained through life experience and is known as "mother wit." Collins writes that "knowledge without wisdom is adequate for the powerful, but wisdom is essential to the survival of the subordinate" (p.55). Because the subordinate have not, historically, had adequate access to elite educational institutions, they have relied on life experiences – lessons learned from actual survival in the world – as the most valuable way of knowing. In qualitative research with marginalized groups, these experiences may be best cultivated and shared via counter-stories.

The other dimension of an Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology that I discuss is "the use of dialogue is assessing knowledge claims" (p.59). This dimension relates to the "connectedness rather than separation that is an essential component of the knowledge validation process" (Belenky et al. 1986, 18 as cited in Collins, 2003, p.59). Dialogue has a humanizing power because of the connection that is made between two people when they speak to one another. However, Collins cautions that

[w]hen African-American women use dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, we might be invoking a particularly female way of knowing...Feminist scholars contend that men and women are socialized to seek different types of autonomy – the former based on separation, the latter seeking connectedness – and that this variation in types of autonomy parallels the characteristic differences between male and female ways of knowing. (p.61)

In regard to this dimension, I took care to not immerse myself so deeply in the research that I assumed that my participants were just like me – as our genders do separate us in one realm of human existence. I did not ignore that my participants and I have very different ways of knowing. On the other hand, I also did not ignore that we share the issue of being bound by “multiple systems of oppression.”

Hip-Hop Feminist Epistemology

A discussion about my personal epistemology would not be complete without an explanation of what I deem a Hip-Hop Feminist Epistemology. This way of knowing is best supported by Joan Morgan’s seminal text *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip-Hop Feminist Breaks it Down* (1999). In articulating an Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology, Collins explains that “Black women are more likely to choose an alternative epistemology for assessing knowledge claims, one using different standards that are consistent with Black women’s criteria for substantiated knowledge and with our criteria for methodological adequacy” (Collins, 2003, p. 52). Hence, I find it fitting that Black women born between 1965 and 1984 who identify as part of the Hip-Hop generation, such as myself, having a unique type of criteria for “substantiated knowledge”, may likely choose an “alternative epistemology” as well. Furthermore, a Hip-Hop Feminist Epistemology (HHFE) is “rooted in the everyday experiences”

(Collins, 2003, p. 54) of Black women from the Hip-Hop generation. Even further, I see Hip Hop as “a kind of interpretive background against which individuals position their own acts and those of others”. Though this conceptualization is still in its development stage, I assert that there are two dimensions that serve as a foundation for a HHFE. The first dimension is a process of knowledge validation that sits within a realm of contradiction, and the second is an inurement of one’s own erotic power.

I assert the first dimension of an HHFE has to do with knowledge validation within a realm of contradiction. I grew up in the post-civil rights era, part of the first generation to come of age in an integrated America (the Hip-Hop generation). We were “socialized on a steady diet of American democracy and the promise of the American dream” (Kitwana, 2002, p. 41). However, what we faced were ceaseless nightmares consisting of unequally high unemployment rates, racial profiling, and police brutality. What we experienced as teens and young adults is quite the opposite of what we were told we would experience by our parents, many of whom marched with Dr. King. Through the media, contradictory messages overwhelmed our senses, yet we learned to read between the lines. We developed a way of knowing that enables us to see beyond the obvious. This way of knowing is what enables me to “see past the machismo in order to be clear about what I’m *really* dealing with.” An HHFE informs my notions of Black masculinity because through a HHFE, I can recognize the pain resulting from gendered racism – the fear of the Black male body, and I can be more accepting - more understanding – of their truth. Like an Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology, an HHFE embodies an ethic of care, not pity. I am sensitized in a place of knowing that transcends

gender lines in a complex, contradictory way. An HHFE embodies a way of using gender and race to undo stereotypes and expand some of the limited discourse that has been used to encapsulate and imprison Black men.

The second dimension of a Hip-Hop Feminist Epistemology is the inurement of one's own erotic power. I define erotic power as control over one's own sexual and sensual being and behaviors. To further describe erotic power, I offer a description from Audre Lorde's essay "Uses of the Erotic". She writes, "Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their meaning within our lives" (Lorde & Bonzani, 1984). Living day-to-day as a Black woman during the age of Hip-Hop requires an understanding of one's erotic power that is different than that of my Black Feminist foremothers (read: Alice Walker, Patricia Hill Collins, etc.). An HHFE embodies a way of knowing how and when to use erotic power to battle sexism and enjoy feminine privilege at the same time. It involves the letting go of the "STRONGBLACKWOMAN" aspiration and allowing oneself to exist within a place of conflation of independence and dependence. This way of knowing is the place from which a love for Hip-Hop grows. It is from where a woman can love a culture that often exploits her, commodifies her man, and is often seen as misogynistic. Hip-Hop Feminists often find themselves fighting "the internal battle...trying to honor both our independence and our femininity" (Morgan, 1999, p.216) just as Black men elementary school teachers try to honor their own independence and masculinity in a woman-dominated profession. As an epistemology *shapes the way research is designed*,

implemented, and articulated, it seems appropriate that I name this as a way of knowing that is impacting how I have approached my research. This HHFE also colors the way I have collected the counter-stories.

Researcher Subjectivity

My dissertation topic is very personal to me; therefore, I realized that I had to pay consistent attention to my subjectivity. Peshkin (1988) defines subjectivity as “an amalgam of the persuasions that stem from the circumstances of one’s class, statuses, and values interacting with the particulars of one’s object of investigation” (p.17). Because my “subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed [which] is insistently present in both the research and nonresearch aspects of [my life]” (p.17), I paid close attention to my subjectivity throughout this study. As a black woman and a teacher, I am affected by the imbalance and lack of diversity in the teaching force. I also consider my subjectivity when I decided to select interviewing as one of my research strategies.

Marianna Paget (1963) argues that interviewing can produce a “science of subjectivity” -that is a rigorous account of another’s perspective- and that this is accomplished most successfully when the interviewer approaches the interview as a “search procedure”- a process of seeking meanings together. (DeVault & Gross, 2007, p. 181)

This dissertation study was and still is an opportunity for me and my participants to “seek meanings” together; an opportunity for me to collaborate with those who are also affected by the imbalance and care to do something about it. As a pragmatist who appreciates balance and as a mother of two girls who I want to one day have healthy relationships with black men (if they so choose), I see the need to promote the well-being of black

boys and men. Furthermore, my positionality as a black woman born in 1974 who has served as a third and sixth grade public school teacher has contributed to my enthusiasm to talk to people born in and around the Hip Hop generation, between the years 1965 and 1984, (Bridges, 2009, p.12) and K-12 school teachers. My background totally colored my motive to listen to this population.

Critical Race Methodology

The juncture of race and gender is a poignant one, so I sought a qualitative methodology in which I could become immersed as a Black woman from the Hip-Hop generation who is a feminist and a critical race theorist. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2000) writes that “[i]n CRT the researcher makes a deliberate appearance in his or her work” (p. 272). Furthermore, Villaverde (2008) asserts that “[a]s feminist theories intersect various methodologies, how the researcher is situated (and her/his awareness of this) in both identity politics and discourse has a tremendous effect on the nature and outcome of research” (p.109). Hence, I find a critical race research methodology to be a good fit for me because it is personal and subjective – unlike traditional educational research that demeans and objectifies the lives of students and teachers of color (Lynn, 2004). A critical race methodology allowed me to not only focus of students and teachers of color, but it also provided room for me to be my full, complete self (Black + Hip-Hop + Feminist), making that “deliberate appearance” in and affecting my research. About a critical race methodology, Tyrone C. Howard explains that

[t]his particular analytic lens acknowledges the presence and perniciousness of racism, discrimination and hegemony, and enables various cultural and racial frames of reference to guide research questions, influence the methods of

collecting and analyzing data, and to inform how findings can be interpreted. (Howard, 2008, p. 956)

A critical race methodology incorporates my personal beliefs and my subjectivities as a researcher. It not only gives credence to my feelings about gendered, racialized oppression and supports my desire to collect the stories of Black men teachers, but it also “generates knowledge by looking to those who have been epistemologically marginalized, silenced, and disempowered” (Denzin & Lincoln. 1994 as cited in Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p.36). Because “the ideology of racism creates, maintains, and justifies the use of a ‘master narrative’”, I employed “a critical race methodology to expose alternative explanations to majoritarian stories....” (Lapayese, September 2007, p. 312). Therefore, for my research on Black male elementary school teachers from the Hip-Hop generation, I utilized a critical race methodology that is informed by Afrocentric Feminist and Hip-Hop Feminist Epistemologies using counter-storytelling to collect the narratives of Black men teachers.

Because my objective was to listen to the stories of black male teachers, I utilized a narrative method to conduct this research project. I chose to use a narrative method in order “to capture storied knowledge” (Hatch, 2002, p.28). This method of research allows me to gather a more full understanding of my participants’ experiences. As the narrator of this research, I did not assume any power. I did not strive to “give voice” to black male teachers. Even though they are a marginalized group and a severe minority (Bridges, 2009), they already have voices. What I did hope to do, however, is hear their voices and “record and interpret” (Reissman, 1993, p.8) the stories they told me. I

sought to broadcast their voices loudly and clearly, and hopefully, shed some light on “the words of [these] ordinary teachers” to show that they “need to be taken seriously in the academic” and professional worlds (Casey, 1993, p.28). According to Riessman (1993), narrative research is

a useful addition to the stock pot of social science methods, bringing critical flavors to the forefront that otherwise get lost. Narrative analysis allows for systematic study of personal experience and meaning: how events have been constructed by active subjects. (p.70)

I encouraged my storytellers to use language to make sense of their lives, constructing stories as a way of sharing their personal experiences with me. Because of this, their stories were not easily “knitted together” as in “traditional qualitative methods” (Reissman, 1993, p.vi). Instead, I looked for connections among the stories and identify unifying themes. I renamed these themes, “purposes”.

The Merriam-Webster online dictionary offers the following definition for the word “purpose”: “1. a: something set up as an object or end to be attained: intention; b: resolution, determination. 2. a subject under discussion or an action in course of execution.” When one has a “purpose” for doing something, there is intention behind the action; there is motivation to execute an action. Consequently, I decided to use the term “purpose” instead of “theme” or “reason” in my effort to best encapsulate the intention my participants demonstrate in the act of teaching. They did not just decide to teach, but they have taken on teaching as a determination, a purpose, something that they have resolved to do. Therefore, the term “purpose” is used to describe the different aspects behind their decisions to teach and how they teach.

Solórzano & Yosso (2002) explain that the connection between CRT and the narrative is that “[c]ritical race theory recognizes that the experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination” (p. 26). Furthermore, they define a critical race methodology as a

theoretically grounded approach to research that (a) foregrounds race and racism... However, it also challenges the separate discourses on race, gender, and class by showing how these three elements intersect to affect the experiences of students of color; (b) challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color; (c) offers a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination; and (d) focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color. Furthermore, it...(c) uses the interdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic studies, women’s studies...to understand the experiences of students of color. (p. 24)

Though this definition focuses on students of color, I see critical race methodology as an appropriate pathway to my research on Black men teachers because of the cultural congruence and cultural sensitivity between my desired research population and me.

This cultural congruence is valuable. Howard & Flenbaugh (2011) cite Tillman (2002) who

called for culturally sensitive research approaches for African Americans which she asserts are critical for understanding the cultural and racial nuances involved in examining the African American experience. She states that ‘it is important to consider whether the researcher has the cultural knowledge to accurately interpret and validate the experiences’ of particular group (4).’ (p.109)

I have the cultural knowledge to interpret and share the stories I collected accurately. In addition, like Harper (2009), I have determined which elements of Critical Race Theory

my study advances. Through the collection of these counter-narratives I found that I was able to advance all five elements of CRT as described in Figure 1:

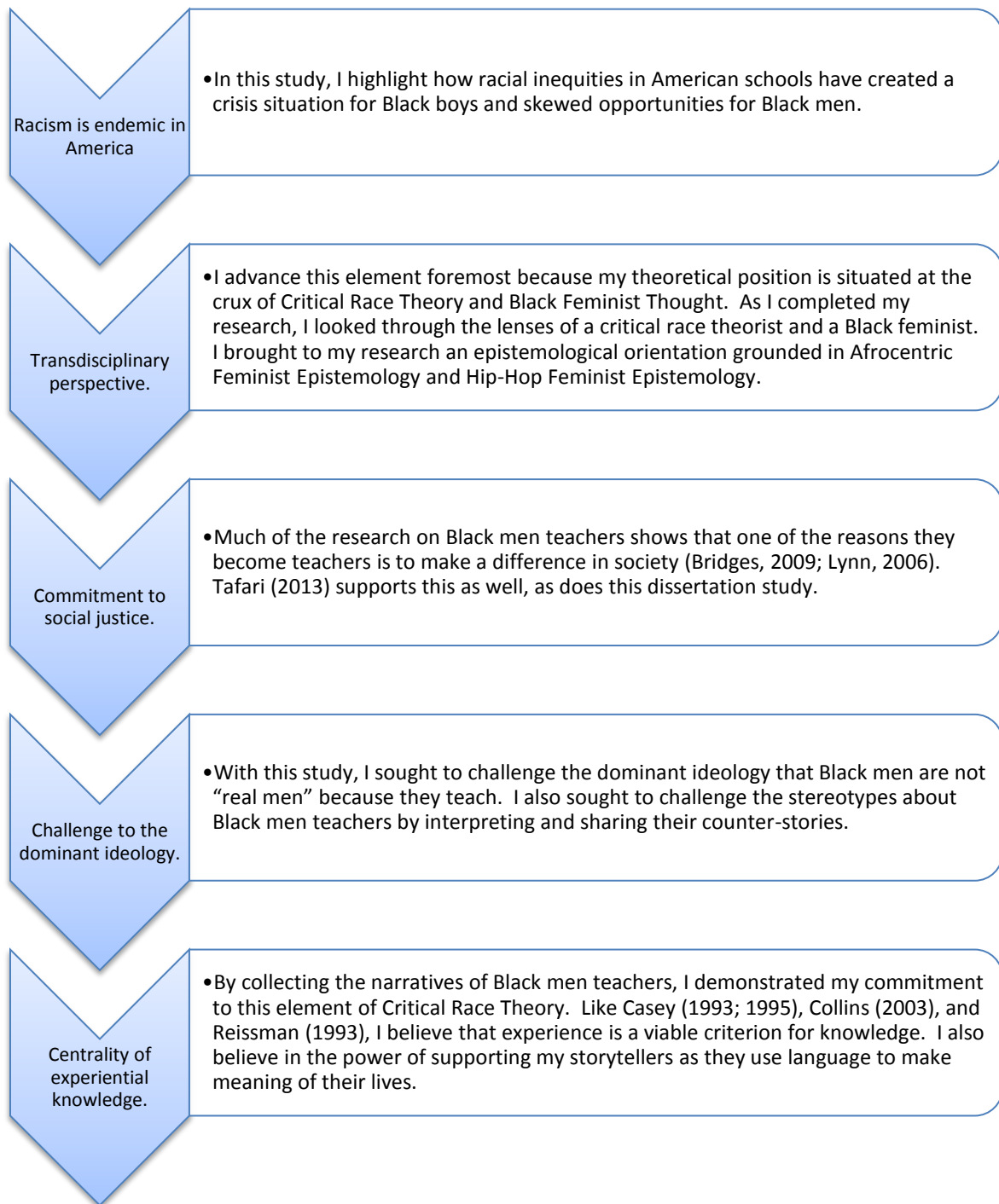


Figure 1. The Advancement of CRT in Tafari Study

Counter-stories, or counter-narratives, have several functions in educational research. I created the chart below (Figure 2) to explicate the functions of counter-stories as identified by Solórzano & Yosso as compared to the dominant ideology and examples of possible counter-stories for Black men teachers:

| | Functions of Counter-stories | Dominant ideology as applied to Black men teachers | Counter-story |
|----|---|---|--|
| A. | “Build community among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice” | Women are nurturing and caring, and therefore, are the best teachers (Villaverde, 2008, p. 31). | Men <i>can</i> be nurturing and caring; men <i>can</i> be teachers. |
| B. | “Challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society’s center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems” | Men who teach are pedophiles (Nelson, 2002). | Black men teach because they want to make a difference in the children’s lives. |
| C. | “Open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing possibilities beyond the ones they live and demonstrating that they are not alone in their position” | 85% of all K12 teachers in America are white, middle-class women (Kunjufu D. J., 2011). There is nothing wrong with the face of the teaching workforce. | Black men teachers are needed to provide walking counter-narratives for all children, especially for Black boys. |
| D. | “Teach others that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone” | Black males who succeed academically are sell-outs (Noguera, 2008, p. 31). | Black males can achieve academic and professional success while maintaining their sense of self. |

Figure 2. Functions of Counter-stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 36)

Reflections on these dominant ideologies and the possible counter-stories to those ideologies are examples of what makes counter-stories so powerful. In further

determining the necessity and importance of collecting counter-stories, I am strongly influenced by Collins (2003) who writes,

[f]or most African-American women those individuals who have lived through the experiences about which they claim to be experts are more believable and credible than those who have merely read or thought about such experiences. Thus concrete experience as a criterion for credibility frequently is invoked by Black women when making knowledge claims. (p.55)

In other words, the best way to know about the crisis affecting Black boys in schools is to ask people who are or were Black boys. Furthermore, if I want to know why Black men become teachers, then I am most likely to satisfy my curiosity by listening to the stories of Black men. When Collins writes of “experience as a criterion of meaning”, she explains that

[s]tories, narratives, and Bible principles are selected for their applicability to the lived experiences of African-Americans and become symbolic representations of a whole wealth of experience. Bible tales are often told for the wisdom they express about everyday life. So their interpretation involves no need for scientific historical verification. The narrative method requires that the story be told, not torn apart in analysis, and trusted as core belief, not “admired as science” (Mitchell and Lewter 1986, 8). (p.56)

This is why I value the narrative. No one can tell about the Black male experience better than Black men. Their “concrete experience” is the quintessential criterion for their knowledge, and their stories are invaluable because of that.

Methods

For this study, I used purposeful sampling and snowball sampling techniques to identify participants. Bogdan & Biklen (2007) asserts that in purposeful sampling, “you

choose particular subjects to include because they are believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory” (p.73). Though I did not have any specific theory that I was trying to prove, I was interested in the connection between Black boys, Black men elementary school teachers, and Hip-Hop; therefore, I was interested in finding participants who would be able to help me to interrogate what these connections are and how they look. Also, as this is a qualitative study, the generalizability of the results is not of great importance. I also utilized snowball sampling (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009, p. 345). The first step I took was to reconnect with those I connected with while researching for my pilot study. I contacted the four participants from my pilot study (none of which meet the criteria for this study), thanked them again for their participation in my initial study, and asked them if they would share my flyer with those who might meet the criteria for this study. Another contact I made during my pilot study was Bryan G. Nelson, author of several books about men who teach young children and founder of MenTeach.org, a clearinghouse of information and resources about men teaching. Nelson offered to publish my flyer on the MenTeach.org website and in its April E-Newsletter. Furthermore, I sent my flyer to my family, friends who are educators or education administrators across the country, and colleagues asking them to recommend Black men elementary school teachers from the Hip-Hop generation for this study. My recruitment flyer was sent out to my university’s School of Education Master’s in School Administration, Doctor of Education, and Doctor of Philosophy program listserves. Moreover, I posted my flyer on my Facebook page, as well as in several Facebook

groups, including “Let’s Talk About Education,” “Real Men Teach,” “Black Male Identity,” and “Black Professionals Network.”

Though my initial intent was to only interview Black men elementary school teachers born between 1965 and 1984 as this is the era designated by Bakari Kitwana in his groundbreaking book, *The Hip-Hop Generation*, I decided to expand my parameters to include two gentlemen who were interested in participating. They were both born within four years of the initial cut-off. I conducted one-on-one interviews with nine Black men elementary school teachers born during the Hip-Hop generation (1965-1988) from around the country. My original range of choice was six to eight; however, I was blessed to encounter nine men who wanted to share their stories. Therefore, I included all of them in the study. I selected this number of men to interview for a few reasons. First, in the study I conducted in the spring of 2011 (Tafari, 2013), I interviewed four Black men teachers from four different states. This number gave me an interesting enough pool that I could identify a baseline of themes in their stories; however, I realized that a few more participants would give me a more thorough understanding of why some Black men teach. Second, four recent dissertations about Black educators (two on Black Men teachers, specifically) utilized small sample sizes as well. For example, in his dissertation, *Peace, Love, Unity & Having Fun: Storytelling The Life Histories And Pedagogical Beliefs Of African American Male Teachers From The Hip Hop Generation* (2009), Thurman Bridges interviewed nine Black men who were at the time or had been K-12 teachers. Bridges utilized Life History and Critical Race Methodologies. In addition, Marvin Lynn interviewed six Black men K-12 teachers and utilized portraiture

as his methodology in his 2001 dissertation, *Portraits in Black: Storying the Lives and the Pedagogies of Black Men Educators*. Toni Williams interviewed five African American teachers in her 2011 dissertation, *Black Teachers Caring for Black Students: Intersecting Identity, Culturally Responsive Teaching, and Life History*, and Charles P. Gause interviewed only four African American teachers in his 2001 dissertation, *How African American Educators “Make Sense” of Hip Hop Culture And its Influence on Public Schools: A Case Study*. Moreover, Squire (2008) explains that

researchers who study life narratives, or who aim for full biographical accounts of at least parts of interviewees’ lives, tend to use small numbers of interviewees, sampled theoretically, often on an opportunistic and network basis, with little randomization within this sampling frame. (p. 47)

From my research, I have learned that a relatively small sample size, acquired via some form of network sampling, is ideal when doing qualitative research utilizing narrative methods, especially when studying Black men teachers. Though the small sample size reflects the “scarcity of African American male teachers...., even a small-scale study of African American male teachers, about whom we know very little, has much to offer” (Bridges, 2009, p. 64). I found the pool of nine gentlemen to be ideal because it is larger than the population size of my pilot study but not too large that I was not be able to manage the interviewing process and cross analysis of the interview and Facebook discussion data.

I interviewed Black men elementary school teachers from around the country for two main reasons. The first reason is that the scarcity of Black men elementary school teachers born between 1965 and 1984 proved difficult for me to procure enough

participants for this project from any one specific geographical area. The second reason is that I found that it enhanced my study to include the diverse voices of Black men elementary school teachers from around the country, instead of from a specific geographical area. I conducted five of the interviews face-to-face. These were with those gentlemen who lived in my home state or had travelled to my home state. However, I interviewed the remaining four gentlemen who lived in other states over the phone. I interviewed each participant one time, and the interviews lasted between 40 minutes and one hour and 20 minutes (depending on the interviewee). During the interview process, I asked the same 13 questions listed in Appendix A to each of the gentlemen. These questions are designed to help me answer my first two research questions: *What are the types of life experiences that shape young Black men from the Hip-Hop generation into elementary school teachers?* and *What inspires Black men to teach elementary school children despite the societal stigmas?* Follow-up questions were also asked, as necessary, to ensure the breadth and depth of each interview.

As another data collection tool, I developed and conducted a Facebook Focus Group in which my storytellers were able to communicate, network, and discuss Hip-Hop and other issues of choice. I decided to employ a Facebook Focus Group instead of a face-to-face focus group because this technique allowed me an extended period of time (three weeks) to observe the participants as they interacted with one another, afforded them more time to ponder answers to the questions that I and other participants posted (see Appendix B), as well as gave them time to locate and share pictures and ideas with the group. Even further, a recent study in the *Journal of Information Technology*

Education by Ryan, Magro, and Sharp (2011) investigates how regular Facebook usage helped first-semester PhD students adjust to their doctoral programs and a new culture.

This study shows that

the Facebook discussions aided in various types of knowledge exchange, providing a conceptual map that facilitated greater adaptation. Next, the interactions appeared to help minimize trepidation related to embarking on a new program of study and adjusting to a new national culture. Third, the Facebook group was useful [in] fostering socialization and community among the students. (p. 1)

I found that the Facebook Focus group (FBFG) did create an environment that *minimize[d] trepidation and foster[ed] socialization and community*. It was important to me that the men in my study developed some sense of community before this study is over. In fact, by the end of the study, one of the gentlemen had created a Facebook group for the other participants to maintain the community they had begun building during the study. All of the men participating in the study already had Facebook pages, so I did not have to ask them to join for the purposes of this study. I did not have to be “Friends” with the participants in order for them to join the group. I did not control what the gentlemen discussed; however, I did tag them if I noticed that they had not responded in a few days. For this second-round of discourse, I posted the questions listed in Appendix B for them to directly address and discuss as a group. These questions are designed to help address my third research question: *How does Hip-Hop culture impact the identity development of Black men who become elementary school teachers?* Because the discussion moved well, and most of the men were actively responding and posting their own questions, I posted one question every other day. The key was to have everyone respond at least once

before posting another question; however, this was not always the case. Therefore, once I had what I felt was “enough” of a response, I moved on to the next question.

The Facebook Focus Group was called “Black Men Teachers and Hip-Hop.” In order to ensure privacy, I made this a “Secret” group. According to Facebook, in a “Secret” group, “Only members see the group, who's in it, and what members post.” When I initially created the group, I made it “Closed” so that the gentlemen could search for the group on Facebook and ask to join. If I had kept it as “Secret”, then the group would have been invisible in the search. However, once all of the participants had been added, I changed the group privacy setting from “Closed” to “Secret”. Once the Group was created, I added a “Group Description” (see Appendix C). In addition to posting questions for the participants to answer and discuss as a group, the Group option allowed me to post lyrics to Hip-Hop songs for analysis and discussion by the participants as well. I posted the lyrics to the favorite songs that my participants shared with me during the face-to-face interviews. These lyrics were posted in the Facebook group for analysis and discussion within the Group. I also reviewed the lyrics of these songs and look for themes within the songs that corresponded with meanings they shared with me during their interviews and during their Facebook discussions. This intertextuality aided me as I searched for patterns and themes within the interviews.

Participant Profiles

Before interviews began, I acquired a signed consent form from each participant (Appendix D). During the FBFG, I asked the participants how they would like to be referenced in my dissertation. I asked them to send their responses to my inbox

(personal, private mailbox on FB). One participant promptly responded: “Gentlemen.” As he was the only one to respond, I reported to the group that from henceforth, I would be referring to them as Gentlemen. In this section, I introduce you to the gentlemen who have entrusted me in the telling of their stories. I have listed them in the order in which they were interviewed one-on-one (see Appendix E). The Participants’ Profile Chart, a chart providing an at-a-glance look at the demographic information pertinent to this study for each participant is included in Appendix F.

Caleb Mitchell.

Caleb Mitchell was the very first of the gentlemen to respond to my advertisement. He e-mailed me in response to my recruitment flyer that he saw posted on the MenTeach website. He is an extremely pleasant man who replied “why wouldn’t I participate in this study?” when I explained the details of the study. He felt a sense of obligation to share his story because he met the criteria. Mr. Mitchell resides and teaches in the Northeastern part of the United States, so we were discussing conducting his interview over the phone until he mentioned that he would be in my home state at a conference the following weekend. He kindly obliged my request to interview him face-to-face during his visit to my home state. I jumped at the chance to meet the first of my participants and conduct the first interview for this study in person. We conducted the interview on the afternoon of the last day of his conference in a restaurant in the conference hotel.

Mr. Mitchell was born in 1979 and was raised in a two-parent household in the southern region of the U.S. His mother is a teacher who he refers to as a “strong *strong*

African-American woman,” and he described his father as having a “very strong work ethic” (Mitchell, 2012, lines 123-125). He earned his baccalaureate degree in elementary education at a historically Black university (HBCU) in the southern region of the United States and his master’s degree in education from a predominantly white university (PWI) in the northeastern region of the U.S. At the time of our interview, he had taught for 11 years in three different school districts. He began his career as a middle school reading teacher, which he hated for the first three months, and then moved into the elementary school classroom where he has taught third, fourth, and fifth grades as a classroom teacher and all grades as a computer technology teacher. He is currently teaching fifth grade.

Mr. Mitchell had negative and positive experiences while a K-12 student and uses those experiences as inspiration in his day-to-day teaching. He shared fond memories of a teacher who took the facilitator role and encouraged students to teach and learn from one another; this technique has served as the foundation for his teaching style to date.

Mr. Mitchell spoke passionately about teaching and serving others:

I’m just committed to the community, committed to making sure that whatever I can do, whatever energy I have, whatever talent I have contributes to the overall building of the community. So if it means working in parent, family,... student engagement, I’m doing that. Working with homeless students? I do some work with that. Mentoring? I try to do my best with that. I just want to know that if someone spoke of my legacy, who I am, that they know that I put everything I could into trying to make every kid, every house, every street a little bit better by what it is that I can contribute. (Mitchell, 2012, lines 13-15)

Mr. Mitchell also has passionate beliefs about Hip-Hop. A proud member of the Hip-Hop generation, he explains that “Black men from that Hip-Hop Generation (I would say

1965 to 1990) stood for something greater than themselves” (FBFG, July 5, 2012). In regards to the music itself, he stated that “Hip-Hop is about evolution, transformation, being able to survive. Many of the messages are about that” (Mitchell, 2012, lines 205-206). Mr. Mitchell’s favorite Hip-Hop artists are Tupac, Common, Canton Jones, Queen Latifah, Floetry, LL Cool J, and the SugarHill Gang. His favorite Hip-Hop songs are “If I Ruled the World” by Nas, featuring Lauryn Hill; “Dear Mama” by Tupac; “Jesus Walks” by Kanye West; and “It’s a Good Life” by Kanye West.

Shawn Wise.

I have the pleasure of knowing Mr. Shawn Wise as a former colleague when I taught third grade in the Mid-Atlantic part of the U.S from 2002 - 2004. Therefore, when I began searching for gentlemen to participate in this study, I looked him up on Facebook and contacted him directly. He promptly agreed to participate. As we are now located several states away from one another, we conducted our interview over the phone one afternoon after his school day ended. When I first met Mr. Wise, he was a fourth grade teacher and had been at the school for two years. Ten years later, he is still teaching at the same school, which has since expanded to include the middle grades, and has taught grades four, five, six, and seven. He is currently teaching fifth and sixth grade math.

Mr. Wise was born in 1979 and was raised by a single mother in the same Mid-Atlantic city in which he currently teaches. He earned his baccalaureate degree in psychology from an HBCU in the southern part of the U.S. Mr. Wise spoke highly of his experiences as a student in a co-ed independent day school, citing that the teachers were

“motivational” and “empowered their students” (Wise, 2012, lines 25-26). As a result, he seeks to motivate his students on a daily basis and enjoys the rewards of the profession.

Just to see a kid who didn’t know something or was written up to be able to progress and learn new things based off of, basically, all you’re telling them. It may not even be just in the classroom, but just learning how to be a better person because there’s really no one else to show them how to be a better person. So when kids come back, and they’re in high school, and the little things that I told them would happen as they got older, and those things have happened, you know, that’s rewarding. (Wise, 2012, lines 127-132)

Born in the middle of the Hip-Hop generation and passionate about teaching, Mr. Wise believes that Hip-Hop can be a powerful tool in the classroom when used to guide students and help them to understand the differences between fact and opinion. Mr. Wise’s favorite Hip-Hop artists are Jay-Z, Kanye West, Big Krit, and 2Chainz. His favorite Hip-Hop songs are any song by Outkast; “1986” by Big Krit; “High Definition” by Rick Ross; and “Ambition” by Wale.

Victor Lucas.

While conducting my study, I attended a School of Education graduation ceremony to support one of my former classmates as he got hooded. Knowing the dearth of Black male elementary school teachers, I was pleasantly surprised to see Mr. Victor Lucas, a Black man, bringing greetings on behalf of his graduating class during the graduation ceremony that evening - let alone one who would be a viable candidate for participation in my study (currently teaching and born during the Hip-Hop generation). I took notes during his speech but wondered what he was doing – did he have his own classroom already? Thus, I decided to look him up on the university website and e-mail

him directly. He responded promptly and eagerly agreed to participate in the study. Though Mr. Lucas lives and works about two hours away from me, I decided to take the drive to interview him face-to-face in his classroom after school.

Victor Lucas was born in 1984 in the north eastern part of the U.S. His family (mother, younger brother, and younger sister) moved to a rural part of the south east to live with his grandmother when he was nine years old. He talks of being raised by a single mom, “coming up in the country,” and not “[having] a lot growing up” (Lucas, 2012, lines 5-6) as inspiration for doing well in school. He shared that he focused on his academics as a preventative measure: a way to stay out of trouble. He earned his baccalaureate degree in elementary education from a PWI in one of the more urban cities in the same southeastern state in which he lives. Two weeks before graduation, Mr. Lucas was recruited to take over a recently-vacated fifth grade math position in a very rural part of the same state. At the time of our interview, he had been teaching for three and a half weeks.

Mr. Lucas proudly spoke of his mother (a middle school principal at the time of the interview) and some of the great teachers he had while growing up. He spoke fondly of those that considered his socio-economic status but never judged him because of it. Because of that, he is a compassionate teacher who is extremely protective of his students and looks to help them however he can. Mr. Lucas is passionate about Hip-Hop culture, and he embodies it.

I talk like I always talk. I don't switch that up. I talk to the kids the way they're used to. The way their parents talk. I just don't use any profanity.As far as

anything else with Hip-Hop...other than that, the way I dress....(Lucas, 2012, lines 295-297)

Mr. Lucas named Notorious B.I.G as his most favorite Hip-Hop artist of all time. Others that he considers to be favorites are Jay-Z, 50 Cent, Young Jeezy, J Cole, K'la, Lil' Wayne, and Snoop Dogg. He favors most of 50 Cent's music, especially his mixtapes and lists "Juicy" by Notorious B.I.G, "Superfreak" by Young Jeezy, and "Spend It" by 2Chainz as his favorite Hip-Hop songs.

Rob Porter.

Mr. Rob Porter was the fourth of the gentlemen in this study to be interviewed. We were introduced by another of the gentlemen in the study. When told about the study, Mr. Porter quickly agreed to participate. However, he was initially concerned because he was born in 1987 (three years after Kitwana's "cut-off" of the hip-hop generation), but I decided to expand my parameters to take advantage of the opportunity to interview Mr. Porter, another Black male elementary school teacher who expressed interest in my study. We conducted our interview face-to-face in his classroom at the end of the school day.

Mr. Porter was born and raised in the southeastern part of the U.S. by both of his parents. He earned his baccalaureate degree in elementary education with a concentration in biology from a PWI in his home state. He spoke in depth about the two student teaching internships he completed -one successful, one unsuccessful- and how they both inspired him to become an effective teacher. He included that these experiences strongly influenced his teaching philosophy. Through the first one, he

explains that he learned “how race and how different perspectives can affect a person” (Porter, 2012, lines 22-23). And through the second experience, he shared that he learned “how a guy would interact with students in an elementary school setting” (Porter, 2012, lines 37-38). At the time of the interview, Mr. Porter was at the end of his first full year as a classroom teacher with a fourth grade math assignment.

I was particularly interested in Mr. Porter’s thoughts on Hip-Hop because he born at the latter extreme of the Hip-Hop generation’s spectrum. I have to admit that I thought he might be more passionate about more contemporary Hip-Hop. However, he shared quite the opposite. As someone who was “saved” in the third grade, Porter has a very strong sense of Christian faith, and I found that his religious convictions, not his age, have strongly influenced his beliefs about Hip-Hop. He admits to being not fond of much contemporary Hip-Hop music because of the negative messages that are sent. Instead, he prefers gospel Hip-Hop. He also shared that he felt that Hip-Hop was a venue that helped him to communicate with and understand his students’ parents better. Mr. Porter’s favorite Gospel Hip-Hop artists are LeCrae, The Truth, Canton Jones, and Triple E. His favorite Hip-Hop songs are “Satisfy You” by Diddy, “Don’t Want to Waste Your Life” by LeCrae, and he favors most of Canton Jones’ work.

Benjamin Robinson.

Benjamin Robinson also came to me by referral. Seeing my recruitment flyer on Facebook, my friend, Shakura (pseudonym) inboxed me with the name and e-mail address of a friend of hers who is a Black male pre-kindergarten teacher. I contacted him promptly, identifying myself as a friend of Shakura’s, and he explained that she had

already informed him that I would be contacting him. After hearing my spiel about the study, he graciously agreed to participate. At Robinson's suggestion, we met early in the evening on a weekday, after school, in a local fast-food restaurant. The restaurant was very quiet, and we were able to find a private corner to sit and talk.

Mr. Robinson was born in 1984 and raised in a small urban city in the southeastern part of the United States. He was raised in a two-parent household, with two college-educated parents. His father is a businessman, and his mom is a teacher. They very strongly encouraged Robinson to do well in school and attend college. Though he calls himself "the worst student ever" (Robinson, 2012, line 25), he earned his first baccalaureate degree in music industry studies with a concentration in business administration and a minor in elementary education. He graduated from a PWI in the same state in which he was raised; then, he went on to earn a second baccalaureate degree in music business finance from an HBCU in the same state. Throughout his four-year long teaching career, Mr. Robinson has taught both pre-kindergarten and kindergarten. At the time of the interview, he was teaching pre-kindergarten in an urban southern school district in his home state.

Benjamin Robinson is particularly passionate about music. He manages several musical artists and has studied music almost all of his life. He explained what he believed to be special about the Hip-Hop generation:

The unique thing about us is that we are old enough but young enough to understand hip-hop and how we can use it to relate fully with the generation of kids that we teach. I dread the day, however, that I will be too old or stubborn to understand and relate at all to the younger generation. (FBFG, June 19, 2012)

He brings this passion, as well as the skills he learned while a member of the corp band, into his teaching. Mr. Robinson's favorite Hip-Hop artists are Jay-Z, T.I., Young Jeezy, 50 Cent, and Snoop Dogg. He found it difficult to name a "favorite song" because he said that he likes music so much. He explained that music speaks about life, so his mood might determine who or what he listens to. However, he did mention that two of the songs he does really like are "Motivation" by T.I and "Big Pimpin'" by Jay-Z.

Karlton Lattimer.

I met Mr. Karlton Lattimer through a mutual friend. Mr. Lattimer is a former colleague of one of my sorority sister's (soror's) husband. My soror's husband (pseudonym: Larry) spoke to me at length about my study. Larry was extremely passionate about the topic, specifically the state of young Black males in public schools and the inequities they face; however, he was not currently teaching, so even though I thoroughly enjoyed our conversation, and he gave me much food for thought, he did not meet the paramount criteria for participating in the study (presently serving as an elementary school teacher). Nonetheless, Larry spoke very highly of Karlton Lattimer and gave me his cellular phone number. When I called Mr. Lattimer, he listened quietly as I explained the requirements of the study, then said, "Sure. I'll participate." I met Mr. Lattimer in his classroom after school and conducted his interview face-to-face.

The most senior participant in this study, Mr. Lattimer was born in 1970 and raised by both of his parents in the eastern part of the southeastern part of the U.S. He grew up in a middle -class family. His mother worked full-time, and his father (who had become paralyzed from the waist down after a car accident when Karlton was two years

old) stayed at home to be the primary caregiver for Karlton and his older brother. Mr. Lattimer played sports as a young boy and earned a scholarship to play collegiate basketball at a public PWI in his home state. He earned a baccalaureate degree in economics and worked as an underwriter for a year before going back to school to pursue a baccalaureate degree in elementary education from an HBCU in the same state. At the time of the interview, Lattimer had been teaching for 18 years. Throughout his career, he had taught third, fourth, and fifth grades. He is currently teaching fifth grade math in a southeastern part of the United States.

Mr. Lattimer grew up in a small town, so his teachers knew and had taught his most of his older family members. Therefore, though he “learned differently [and often] pretend[ed] to be engaged in class” (Lattimer, 2012, line 46), he remembered his teachers because they affected him in good and bad ways. In addition, Lattimer is passionate about coaching and makes an interesting connection between teaching and coaching. He explains that

there is not too much of a difference between teaching and coaching. The two go hand-in-hand. You have to plan for what you’re going to do with them. You need to know how to handle groups of kids. Some of the organizational stuff I bring to the classroom, I take from the gym. I couldn’t be a teacher if I didn’t coach first. (Lattimer, 2012)

Mr. Lattimer embodies Hip-Hop as a culture. He explained that it is “a big part of our culture” (Lattimer, 2012, line 260) and uses it to relate to his students as a way of speaking and understanding the world. Mr. Lattimer’s favorite Hip-Hop artists are

Tupac, LL Cool J, Erykah Badu, Lil' Wayne, Venus, EPMD, and Black Sheep. His favorite song is "Thug Passion" by Tupac.

Minister Jovan Browne.

Minister Jovan Browne was referred to me by a mutual friend whose children used to go to the school where he teaches. Minister Browne lives and teaches in the Mid-Atlantic part of the U.S. He was incredibly excited about the study and eager to participate, so we played e-mail tag for several weeks; however, we were eventually able to conduct our telephone interview for one afternoon during his lunch break.

Minister Browne was born in 1977 and raised in the Mid-Atlantic part of the U.S. by both of his parents. He earned a baccalaureate degree in biology from an HBCU in the southern part of the U.S. and, at the time of the interview, he was pursuing a master's degree in theology. He considers himself to be someone who is simple, upfront, honest, and really laid-back: a person who has always "led by example" (Browne, 2012, line 40). He enjoys being a product of the Hip-Hop generation because "we all used our music to bond, as opposed to today, where it seems like music is mostly divisive" (lines 44-45). He explains,

We are more conscious!We were about movements, history, and civil rights. We cared about our voice more than money. It was about pride more than accolades. We were more about community then....We are fighters, but not quick to pick up a gun or turn to drugs to solve our problems. We are lovers of our women. Not prone to disrespect them or use them as objects of our desires. (FBFG, June 20, 2012)

Minister Browne truly enjoys teaching at a private, Christian school. He feels that his teaching environment gives way for him to promote and express his personal and

religious beliefs, which are very important to him. As a former Christian school student himself, he recalls being taught that he had a “biblical responsibility to care for others” (Browne, 2012, line 348), and this has stayed with him as he had made decisions throughout life. At the time of the interview, Minister Browne had been teaching for seven years, having taught first through eighth grades. He was currently teaching science to fourth through eighth graders.

Minister Browne’s favorite Hip-Hop artists are Grandmaster Flash, Kurtis Blow, Kool Moe Dee, Slick Rick, Doug E. Fresh, Heavy D and the Boyz, Queen Latifah, EPMD, Lords of the Underground, Big Daddy Kane, Kwame, and his all-time favorite rap group (“hands down”) is A Tribe Called Quest. He also favors Gospel Hip-Hop artists LeCrae and Triple E. His favorite Hip-Hop songs are Ed.O.G & Da Bulldogs’ “Be a Father To Your Child” and the songs from A Tribe Called Quest’s *Midnight Marauders* album.

Cole Boyd.

I was given Mr. Cole Boyd’s name by one of the participants in my 2011 study (I interviewed Black men K-12 teachers teaching – see Tafari, 2013). Upon receipt of my e-mail referencing who referred me to him, Mr. Boyd promptly responded that he was willing to participate. I, initially, had reservations about including Mr. Boyd in the study because he was born in 1988 (one year after Mr. Porter); however, I was having so much fun meeting and hearing the stories of these young Black men teachers, that I decided to expand my age parameters once again. I believe that extending the age limit one more time could allow me another opportunity to hear the perspective of a man who was born

on the extreme tail end of the Hip-Hop generation. As Mr. Boyd lives and teaches in the southern part of the United States, several hours away from me, we decided to conduct our interview over the telephone.

Mr. Boyd has a very laid-back and calm demeanor. Born in 1988 and raised in the southern part of the U.S by both parents. His passion for education was strongly influenced by his father, who went back to school while Boyd was a child, to become a college professor. Boyd earned his baccalaureate degree in elementary education at a PWI in his home state. He is also the first of two participants that I interviewed in this study who is a graduate of the Call Me Mister program (see Appendix G). At the time of our interview, Mr. Boyd had been teaching for two years. He had been hired as a second grade teacher and was still teaching second graders. However, he informed me that he would be moving to a third grade classroom at the beginning of the next academic year.

Mr. Boyd has been passionate about working with young people for as long as he can remember and has always had a “connection with youth” (Boyd, 2012, line 4). He also feels that being a part of the Hip-Hop generation sustains this passion because it paves the way for better relationships with parents. Furthermore, as someone born during this time period, surrounded by Hip-Hop music and culture, he “understands [that] it takes hard work to achieve our goals and life desires” (FBFG, June 22, 2012). His favorite Hip-Hop artist is Drake, and his favorite songs are “Successful” by Drake and “A Milli” by Lil’ Wayne.

Morris Bowman.

Mr. Morris Bowman was the very last gentleman that I interviewed for this study. I was given his name and e-mail address by Mr. Matthew Jamison, a former elementary school teacher who participated in my pilot study. Mr. Jamison is now an elementary school principal, but he sent me the names of a few gentlemen who he thought might be good candidates for my present study. When I contacted Mr. Bowman and indicated that Mr. Jamison suggested that I contact him, he replied, "If Mr. Jamison gave you my name, then count me in." I later learned that Mr. Jamison was a mentor to Mr. Bowman while they were in college, and they are both graduates of the Call Me Mister program. As Mr. Bowman lives in a different state than I do, we agreed to conduct our interview over the telephone on an evening after his school day had ended.

Morris Bowman was born in 1984. He was born to "two parents who had been steadily in the use of drugs" (Bowman, 2012, line 4). He grew up in poverty and moved around a lot, until he was able to settle in with his godmother, who raised him. Mr. Bowman earned a baccalaureate degree in elementary education from a private PWI in his home state. He also earned a master's of education degree in Divergent Learning from a different PWI in his home state. At the time of the interview, he had been teaching for five years. Throughout his career, he had taught fourth and fifth grades and was currently teaching fifth grade language arts and science to single-gender classes. Moreover, Mr. Bowman has just earned the title of Teacher of the Year for his work during the academic year prior to our interview.

Mr. Bowman has very strong views on gender behaviors and was brutally honest (during his interviews) about his interpretations of how women behaved and emoted versus how men act and think. Mr. Bowman spent a good deal of his youth and young adulthood taking care of his younger brother, and this served as a major inspiration for him to succeed. Furthermore, he always had a natural affinity for working with youth. Mr. Bowman expressed a sincere appreciation for the vastness and diversity that exists within the Hip-Hop generation. He felt that it was difficult to pinpoint any particular characteristics or qualities because of the uniqueness of human beings, particularly African-Americans during that twenty year span. He shares.

one of us has such a different experience and we all know that guy that grew up in our era that thinks drastically different than we do. I do think that some things in hip hop has changed in relation to music but interpretation is the key and that interpretation is based on a combination of culture and race in most cases. (FBFG, July 4, 2012)

Mr. Bowman's favorite Hip-Hop artists are Tupac, Notorious B.I.G, Mystikal, Cash Money Billionaires, Common, Mos def, and Fabolous. His favorite Hip-Hop songs are "Justify My Thug" by Jay Z, "Heart of the City" by Jay Z, "Keep Your Head Up" by Tupac, "Dear Mama" by Tupac, and "Black on Both Sides" by Mos Def.

Researcher Trustworthiness

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of this study, I did several things. First, once face-to-face interviews were completed, I listened to the tapes two to three times each, and then, I transcribed the recordings verbatim. During my 2011 study, I realized that listening to the recordings multiple times before transcribing helped me to begin to

identify patterns within each individual interview and themes among the different interviews. Furthermore, I found that becoming more familiar with the recordings helped to speed up the transcription process. Next, once the recordings were transcribed, I read through the transcriptions twice. The first time, I annotated each transcription, noting general ideas in the columns. Once that step was complete, I reviewed the notes I acquired during annotation and devised the five “purposes.” Then, I assigned each purpose a color, and then, the second time I read through each transcription, I categorized the quotes by highlighting the quotes in the colors assigned to their respective purposes. I repeated this process for the data I collected in the Facebook group as well.

Summary

In Chapter III, I discussed my epistemological orientation: a cross-section of Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology and a hip-Hop Feminist Epistemology. Then, I addressed my subjectivity as a researcher who has a vested interest in the success of black boys in school and a genuine interest in Black men elementary school teachers from the Hip-Hop generation. I also addressed the methodology that I have chosen to utilize to conduct this qualitative study. A critical race methodology using narrative methods to learn about Black men elementary school teachers from the Hip-Hop generations was used. Nine participants were interviewed one-on-one, and they all participated in a three-week long Facebook Focus Group. Finally, the profiles of these nine gentlemen are included in this section.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS/FINDINGS

Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old, he will not depart from it. - Proverbs 22:6 (New American Standard Bible, 1995)

I set out to find out the reasons Black men from the Hip-Hop generation become elementary school teachers. I wanted to learn about them, hear their stories, talk with them about their career choices, and discover how Hip-Hop mattered in the scope of all of this. The Black men elementary school teachers in this study are empowered, passionate, caring, and intelligent. In this section, I share my findings. As this is a qualitative study, using a critical race methodology and narrative in method, my findings do not constitute “the answers” to any questions. What these findings do represent, however, are the voices of the nine Black men elementary school teachers from the Hip-Hop generation with whom I had the opportunity to interact and from whom I was honored to learn. In the stories that I interpret, I counter the ways of knowing about Black men and challenge many of the dominant ideologies that currently prevail. I began this chapter with proverbs 22:6 because three of the nine gentlemen I interviewed cited that very verse at some point during their one-one-one interviews. I found the reappearance of this particular scripture in my transcripts to be quite powerful. I also

learned that they each had specific “purposes” for becoming elementary school teachers. When I reviewed the transcripts of my interviews and the FBFG, I discovered five “purposes” for teaching that stood out to me the most (listed in no particular order). I found the following purposes to be most prevalent in my research:

- Teaching as an act of resistance;
- Teaching as an act of otherfathering;
- Teaching as a calling;
- Teaching as an act of passion; and
- Teaching as an expression of Hip-Hop.

Teaching As An Act Of Resistance

Elvis was a hero to most
But he never meant shit to me
you see he's straight up racist
that sucker was simple and plain
Mother fuck him and John Wayne
'Cause I'm black and I'm proud
I'm ready and hyped, plus I'm amped
Most of my heroes don't appear on no stamps
sample a look back
you look and find nothing but rednecks
for four hundred years if you check
“Don't Worry; Be Happy” was a number one jam
Damn, if I say it, you can slap me right here
Let's get this party started right
Right on, c'mon,
what we got to say?
Power to the people! No delay
Make everybody see in order to fight the powers that be
(Ridenhour, 1989)

When I sat down to compose this section, the first section of the findings of my research, Public Enemy's "Fight The Power" was the first rap song that came to mind. In the song, rapper, Chuck D, and sidekick, Flava Flav, unapologetically spout about their need to fight against the misuse of power and racist ideologies. In this particular verse, they focus on challenging the personas of two beloved white American icons by exposing them as racists. They go further to explain that they would not ignore racial and social injustices, as they imply that the popular song "Don't Worry; Be Happy" (McFerrin, 1988) asserts that some African-Americans do. "Fight The Power" is a powerful byproduct of a "culture of resistance to the institution of slavery [in which the members of Public Enemy demonstrate] their opposition through their language and communication patterns...." (Gause, 2008, p. 50). For many of the gentlemen in this study, becoming a teacher was a way for them to "fight the powers that be": a way to react to social and educational inequities that were, both, underlying and prevalent; a way to live their commitment to social justice; a way to resist and challenge dominant ideologies. Recognition and acknowledgement of these inequities served as a stimuli, in many cases, that compelled them to become elementary school teachers. This recognition led them to teach as an act of resistance, as a way to fight against the ideologies, ideas, concepts, and structures that fuel the inequities that they face as Black men in a woman-dominated profession. These gentlemen are fighting against statistics; against stereotypes; against dry curriculums that do not prepare Black boys for success; against gender inequities in the profession; and for a positive image of Black men.

The Fight Against Statistics

One of the first of these inequities to come to surface in my research was the fight against statistics. I was not surprised to find that, in an American school system that boasts almost 3 million teachers with only 62,000 of them being Black men (Gibson, 2009), none of the gentlemen in this study could remember having any Black men teachers while they were in elementary school. This lack of Black men teachers in the elementary school is of concern to several of the men in this study. Cole Boyd, a graduate of the Call Me Mister program, whose first man teacher was a white second grade teacher, shared that he did not have a Black man teacher until he was in high school. He reported that as he grew as a student, he “definitely noticed that there wasn’t a lot of male teachers, and that was definitely something that I thought about when I decided to become a teacher” (Boyd, 2012, lines 16-18). Victor Lucas shares a similar experience.

When I think about it, we didn’t have any teachers that looked like us. Like in [my home town] at that school, there was Black person in the cafeteria, the custodial staff was Black, and then we had 2 Black teachers: one was a teacher assistant, one was an actual teacher – 4th grade teacher. There was a kindergarten teacher as well that was Black, too, Ms. Poole, and that’s it. So we didn’t have anybody to relate to or to look at like ..you know...so we can make something out of ourselves. (Lucas, 2012, lines 160-165)

The dearth of Black men teachers affected Mr. Lucas. He acknowledges that not having “anybody to relate to” or who he felt was a realistic role model was something that he missed, and he wanted to do something about that. Minister Jovan Browne

reflected on the number of Black men elementary school teachers currently teaching. He shares:

I have another brother that I am close with. He teaches at a charter school We swap stories about how important it is for us to have an influence on these kids. We always come to the same conclusion. There's not enough of us out here to make a difference. We can touch a few kids, but more of our kids are still falling through the cracks because they don't have that male influence. (Browne, 2012, lines 565-569).

Browne's concern with the low numbers relates a feeling of isolation and concern that students' needs are not being met. Browne and his friend feel like their backs are up against the wall because they cannot reach enough children.

The Fight Against Stereotypes

The second concept that the gentlemen in this study discussed resisting against is the myriad of stereotypes that they face on a daily basis in one way or another. They all agreed that the most prevalent stereotype against Black men elementary school teachers is that they are homosexual. Caleb Mitchell shares his experience with this particular stereotype:

I have encountered mothers of my students who will hit on me...and get upset that I don't flirt back. So, I was approached by one about my "perceived" sexuality among "some of the parents" as I was told...because I didn't take the bait. It makes me laugh now...but it was nauseating when I started...because my focus is and always has been focused on making their children better students and leaders. I just shook it off and kept it pushing. Eventually, their children's progress wins out versus a date. (FBFG, 2012, p.15)

The frustration that Mitchell experienced is understandable and, honestly, borders on sexual harassment. There is a real gender issue here. Because he does not "take the

bait”, the belief is that he must be gay, and then, he is even approached about the assumption. Sargent (2001) also addresses this concept:

The social construction of homophobia acts as a ritualized mechanism of social control, especially since it has been conveniently (and erroneously) conflated with pedophilia.

Dennis: But the thing that shocks me is the parents’ approach. They immediately think that you’re gay. That’s one of the things that comes up and they ask questions in a round-about way. I just recently got married. For most of the years I hadn’t gotten married and so they would not see a ring and they’d look at my age and they’d go, “Oh, my gosh, this guy’s probably gay. I don’t want a gay man teaching my children.”

John: Fortunately, I’ve been a successful kindergarten teacher, so I started to develop...a reputation of being good. And so parents trust me. But they still in the back of their mind go, “Why is this guy teaching young children? Why is a male...?” They really question that quite a bit. Some of them will even be point blank and say, “Why are you teaching here? Don’t you think you should be...? You’re very strange to teach.”

The men in my study are aware that if they celebrate their feminine aspects a little too much and really show their caring and nurturing sides to the children then they become suspect.... [I]t’s ironic that the very aspects of masculinity that ought to be modeled- responsibility and care for children- are the very things that are the most suspect. Here we have the reproduction of absent fathers, a kind of “back door” (indirect) reproduction of mothering. (pp. 61-62)

The above excerpt from the Sargent text highlights some of the very concepts that I found in my study. Like Mr. Mitchell, Sargent’s participants were also very much bothered by the assumption that they *must* be gay because they enjoyed to work with young children. On the other hand, I found it particularly interesting that several of the gentlemen in the study seemed to buy into the stereotype themselves. For example, at the beginning of my

face-to-face interview with Benjamin Robinson, he said that he was the only male teacher in his school. Then, towards the end of his interview, he self-corrects, stating that he is the only “straight” male teacher in his school. He notes that the other two male teachers are homosexual men. Initially, Robinson did not acknowledge the two other male teachers in his school building as men because they are homosexual. In Robinson’s mind, homosexuality has “become a negative symbol of masculinity” (Sargent, 2001, p. 63). He then went on to share his trepidation about gay men in the elementary classroom. Furthermore, all of the other men in the study, with the exception of one, were sure to share with me that they were not gay at some point during their interviews. Though I never asked any of the participants about their sexual orientation, all but two (Mitchell, Boyd) made it a point to either directly self-identify as “straight” (Robinson), “not gay” (Lattimer, Lucas), or to make mention of their respective wives, ex-wives, or girlfriends (Wise, Porter, Barron, Browne) at some point during the one-on-one interview. It seems as if opposing homosexuality as a facet of their purpose for teaching is another point of resistance for the some of these Black men teachers. In other words, they want it to be clear that not all Black men elementary school teachers are homosexual. I found this resistance against being labeled as homosexual seemed to be at the forefront of their minds. I am not sure if that is because they are homophobic or because they are so very used to be labeled as homosexual that they so adamantly fight against the label.

Another stereotype that the gentlemen in this study encounter and fight against is being labelled as lazy. Cole Boyd shares:

A stereotype that I have come across is the "laziness" tag. My coworkers are so astonished at how much time and effort I put into teaching. I am the first to arrive and one of the last to leave. They find it unusual that I go to students' houses. Many have never seen a black male in a "women's" profession who is passionate about teaching. (FBFG, 2012, p.16)

Boyd's commitment to teaching is found astonishing by others because of the intersection of his gender and race. This intersection can be described as a "multidimensional understanding of black men as a single social position – *blackmen, one word* -...under which black men are both sometimes privileged by gender and oppressed by gendered racism" (Mutua, 2006, p. 18). This idea of a Black man going above and beyond the call of duty in support of anyone other than themselves is "unusual" to his colleagues. The association of the "laziness tag" (also interpreted as "shiftless") with Black people, and Black men in particular, dates back to Colonial times. This is an example of a myth that continues to plague the Black community today (Chapman, 2007). Porter adamantly agrees with Chapman and Boyd's assertions:

I must agree with all that has been said. Cole, I too am one of the first to come and last to leave, I spend my weekends going to support my students in their extra-curricula activities, call parents to let them know how their students are doing positive and negative. I do all sorts of activities for the school school; parents holla. LOL! I've been blessed where parents don't talk about me. Being this is my first year, all I heard from parents is thank you. My co-workers on the other hand, LOL, I can never do go enough for some of them. (FBFG, 2012, p.16)

Porter is disappointed by the lack of recognition from his coworkers in the wake of all that he does to support his students and their families. Regardless of the amount of effort that he puts into his students, they still see him as lazy and shiftless. However, the lazy

label becomes another way these men have become inspired to teach. They teach and teach well as a way of resisting the laziness label.

The Fight Against Dry Curricula

The third aspect of teaching as an act of resistance for these gentlemen is their fight against dry curriculums that do not prepare Black boys for success. They express concern that Black boys are not being prepared for life. In the FBFG, Robert Porter says, “the sad truth is that our baby boys and girls have so much to learn outside of the common core that it doesn’t make sense” (p.18). This demonstrates the desire from these Black men teachers for more unsanctioned, or authentic, curricula that will help students, especially Black male students, to have more full lives. In Milner’s (2008) narrative study exploring the counter-narratives of teachers in urban school settings, he shares the story of one Black male teacher: Mr. Jackson. Mr. Jackson was committed to social change, and his desire to teach was shaped by “the idea that he needed to help his students find value and relevance of school for their lives” (p.1580). Like the gentlemen in my study, Mr. Jackson wanted his students to be successful in life, beyond the school building’s walls.

The Fight Against Gender Inequities

The fight against gender inequities in the education profession is the fourth aspect of teaching as an act of resistance that emerged in this study. These gender inequities present themselves in the form of the feminization of teaching and its effects on the roles of men in the classroom. During the interviews, though the gentlemen seemed to have good relationships with women in general, several of the gentlemen expressed somewhat

of a resistance to women in education: whether it be their administrators, colleagues, or the single mothers of students. During the FBFG, Minister Browne asserts the following:

The most challenging thing for me is having to follow administrators that don't have a clue about how to impact the lives of our boys. The academy at which I teach has all women in the administration. This is not to say that all women do not have a clue because I have seen some phenomenal teachers and principals that could reach our boys. I am saying that these women are out of touch. (FBFG, 2012, p.13)

Browne admits that his faith in the administrators is shaken because he believes their gender causes them to be “out of touch” and prevents them from being able to adequately connect with their male students. During his one-on-one interview, he explains:

Thank God that the academy [where I teach] is connected to the church because at least they can see some of the male leaders and ministers and accountants and people that work for the church administration and stuff. In the school, our whole administrative staff in the academy is all women. When I voiced that, when I say something, when I try to crack the ceiling and get in administration, I'm treated like I'm saying bad words. I'm not doing the correct thing, or I'm telling people something that's improper. The last time I checked, this is a biblical based church and school, where it's clear... and I've heard the pastor preach it, that the man is the head of the household just as Jesus was the head of the church. Men are put in place to lead the family, to guide the church. It does not say women cannot have leadership roles, but when you have a structure set in place where all of your leadership staff are all women, what kind of message does that send? Especially if you're in education, and you want boys to see that they can be better than what they see on television, that they can be better than what some of their fathers are or their uncles or whatever, and they can't see that positive influence. How sad is that they see me and they say, “Wow, that's one. Respect Minister Browne.” That's only one. (Browne, 2012, lines 515-529)

Minister Browne presents an argument here that says a few things: 1.) that women are out of place as the primary leaders of a religious academic institution; 2.) men are ascribed to serve in leadership roles just as Jesus Christ did; and 3.) we cannot expect our boys to

grow into positive men if they do not see positive male models before them in a leadership capacity. Minister Browne's perspective on the gender imbalance is based, in large part, on his perspective Biblical teachings that prescribes that "men are put in place to lead the family". Fairclough (2007) offers some historical insight into how the face of leadership in schools became feminized in the Black community:

Because gender roles were less blatantly unequal within the black community [than in the white community], it was easier for women teachers to assume positions of leadership. They could not be preachers in the mainstream churches, but the position of teacher ran a close second in terms of prestige and influence. (p. 227)

Social conditions and historical events like WWI drove black men out of the classroom over 100 years ago. However, the struggle to shift that paradigm again is a difficult one. Morris Bowman, also has very strong views on this subject. He expresses "I think our 'sistahs' sometimes have a mindset that is different from ours [men]: an emotional, complicated, hard to describe one" (FBFG, 2012, p.13). To make his viewpoint crystal clear, Bowman adjoins:

Uhm...no offense to women, but you're talking about women, and women have women ways and women tendencies. And there are some things that women are going to cloud education with just by the mere fact of their design as being a woman. Men are about solution and getting the job done: period, point blank. Women have emotions, so emotion ties up the business of education: point blank, period. And if it's a woman's job, and women do it all the time, and women are in front of the kids, what you expect your kid to turn out like if they're around nothing but women? So they gotta have a male balance: period. (Bowman, 2012, lines 370-375)

I find it ironic that his strong resistance against gender imbalance seems to be informed and centered on inequity: a pendulum swing, if you will. Both, Minister Browne and Mr. Bowman's frustration with the crisis affecting Black boys and with the lack of male influence in academic spaces reveals itself in a lashing out against their female counterparts, generalizing and stereotyping them. Bowman proclaims this as his call to balance. For Browne, it's about religion. Interestingly enough, I find this sort of push-back to be the case with a few of the other gentlemen in this study as well. Cole Boyd discusses how the feminization of the teaching profession affects him:

There's a huge shortage in male teachers, especially African-American male teachers, so I think also being an educator, part of my role is to show, you know, my colleagues that an African-American male teacher does have a right and can educate students along with Caucasian male or Caucasian women and even African-American women. And also to help other African-American males see that there's a future in education because I know when I was growing up, becoming a teacher was not a sought after career or profession....(Boyd, 2012, lines 67-73)

...initially it is difficult for an African-American male to enter the education field, especially to elementary or early childhood grades, and I think part of it is because there hasn't been a lot of African-American males to do it. (lines 138-140)

Though Boyd does not directly push back against women in education as Minister Browne and Mr. Bowman do, he clearly recognizes the dearth of Black male bodies in the classroom and verbalizes that part of his purpose for teaching is to resist against this dearth and show others that African-American men are quite capable of doing the job alongside all races of women. Rob Porter continues to express the need for Black men in the elementary classroom.

One week I went over to ... another elementary school. I went over there just to observe for a week. [At] that school, they were actually doing a book study about how to motivate the young African-American male, and that's when the light started coming on. Our males, they aren't doing good. It's not just enough for me to be there for them. I gotta inspire them even more to do more with their life – not just be an example, but inspire them to do more than what I've done. (Porter, 2012, Lines 158-163)

Resisting, in a sense, against his own life choices, Mr. Porter, becomes determined to be a teacher because he wants to help young African-American males make better life choices for themselves. He is committed to this work.

I mean as long as I have breath in my body, as long as I'm in the system, I'm a try my best to make sure that these young African-American men don't become a statistic, so that's what my biggest driving force is. I mean I even sit down with my kids, "You know what they say about you? They say that if you're not proficient by 3rd grade, that ...you're gonna probably be in jail, so they're preparing jailhouses for you. Don't be the statistic." You know what I'm saying? Then, like I said, going to different conferences and hearing that less than one percentage of teachers are African-American males. I want to change that statistic, you know what I'm saying? I'm like, I'm trying to rob other majors (laughs). When I was in college, I was like, "Yo man, you got a bright future in education! Come over here and join me." You know stuff like that, you know what I'm saying? Because our young men need it. They really need it. (lines 272-281)

Porter's acknowledgement of the low numbers of African-American male elementary school teachers and the troubling statistics regarding the building of prisons in preparation for young Black men, drives him to not just teach but also to educate his students on what may lay before them if they are not successful in school.

The more men we get, the more African-American men we get in school, the more or the less we have them on the streets. The less problems, the less crimes we have, the less of them will be in jail if we actually educate them and give them

an opportunity to actually do something with their life, instead of trying to lock them up all the time. (Porter, 2012, lines 417-420)

Mr. Porter also points to inequities in regard to the face of the American prison population as another point of resistance. The drive to resist against current societal inequities compels Rob Porter to be an elementary school teacher. It serves as a purpose for him to teach.

The Fight For A Positive Image Of Black Men

The last aspect of this purpose, Teaching as an act of Resistance, is the fight for a positive image of Black men. The idea is that Black men become teachers, in part, to deconstruct deficit notions as well as negative stereotypes and beliefs about Black men, especially Black men who teach young children. This aspect incorporates the desire to fight against the racial and gender-based stereotypes of Black men elementary school teachers (lazy, shiftless, homosexuals) by being the change they wish to see in the world (Ghandi). This resistance is born out of the many negative perspectives of Black boys and men. Minister Browne states

One of the biggest things that I dislike is that people come across a young black male and they automatically think, “Uneducated, ain’t about nothing, don’t know how to talk, all they talk is that slang. Oh, what is he up to now?” (Browne, 2012, lines 455-458)

It is these kinds of perceptions that encourage the gentlemen in this study to fight back. They have a myriad of purposes for teaching, but resisting against negative stereotypes like Minister Browne referenced are among these purposes. Porter expresses, “I strive to be the opposite of the picture that is painted as the average African American male”

(FBFG, 2012, p.6). Mr. Cole Boyd shares that he feels that part of his purpose for teaching is to

shine a good light on African-American males because in my generation and generations before me, African-American males – there are certain stereotypes that we have. One of those is being uneducated and not getting a college education. And another is, you know, not being a teacher. (lines 64-67)

Bowman also expresses a deep-feeling about the image of Black men in education:

the motives and actions of some men in education has created a microscope on many, if not all, of us. I feel like I'm fighting this battle in the profession and this battle as a black man. On both ends, we have actions of men crippling the power we have as men. It's amazing how we have the stereotypes of black men that are trying to make a positive change and then we have the stereotype of the type of black man people created by the circulation of black men occupying prisons: those that are athletes, so forth and so on. Regardless of what a "brotha" does there is something to say, but my philosophy is do all the good you can, include as many as you can, *and in the end reinvent instead of reinforce the negative stereotypes of a black man. I decide what a black man is everyday, and no one has to like it.* I'll make changes based on the fruit that comes from my labor. (FBFG, 2012, p.16, emphasis mine)

Mr. Bowman speaks with passion and fervor. I especially admire his understanding that he decides “what a black man is everyday, and no one has to like it.” This is the kind of resistance that fuels him and Black men like him to pursue teaching as a profession and to continue teaching, regardless of what others say or do. This is an act of resistance steeped in activism and demonstrates a commitment to social justice. In this same vein, Mr. Lattimer dresses the part. He explains,

I used to wear suits every day: a tie, a shirt, tie, coat. I remember the kids would laugh. The school I first went to even the teachers would ask me: “where you going? To church?” They called me Preacher Man. I did that for two years. I

was teaching third grade, so a lot of times I would be out in the playground playing with the kids with a tie and shirt on. To me, that was setting the tone for the rest of my career, basically. Everything going in as a teacher, I wanted the kids to understand that I was serious about school. The people that I was working with, I wanted to understand that I was serious about my profession because I feel like you have to be twice as good as everybody else. I truly believe that.

When I had my first open house, I remember all the kids' parents came to see who was teaching their kid....*I remember them coming just to see the black guy that's teaching their kids*, which was interesting, because that was my first time experience. That was my first time experiencing something like that. It didn't catch me off guard but ...that's why I wore suits and stuff. That first impression they got was a good impression. I just remember them all coming to see. They were all in the hall and even had parents coming that didn't have kids in the class coming to see and meet me. That was interesting. You have to keep proving yourself each year. This is going into my 18th year, and I'm still proving myself. It's almost like no matter what you do, you still got to do better than what you did last year. (Lattimer, 2012, lines 143-175, emphasis mine)

Mr. Lattimer demonstrates a commitment to “setting the tone” for his career and for his students. He became a walking counternarrative by ignoring the teasing of his colleagues and by being the kind of Black male teacher that parents flocked “to see and meet.”

Though I can sense his vexation with having to continuously prove himself even after 18 years of successful teaching, Mr. Lattimer he speaks with enthusiasm and allegiance about his dedication to maintaining this image. Minister Browne offers additional thoughts on this issue:

I want you to see that one; all black men aren't trifling, disrespectful, only worried about what they can get from women, only trying to get over doing the wrong thing, drinking, drugs, in jail. *Kids need to see that.* (Browne, 2012, lines 77-79, emphasis mine)

I find “kids need to see that” as such a powerful statement. It speaks to the foundation of why the gentlemen in this study teach elementary school children. Caleb Mitchell also

speaks fervently about his purpose for teaching from the aspect of fighting back against negative stereotypes. He speaks about the legacy that he hopes to leave behind:

I just want to know that if someone spoke of my legacy, who I am, that they know that I put everything I could into trying to make every kid, every house, every street a little bit better by what it is that I can contribute. (Mitchell, 2012, lines 13-15)

Mr. Mitchell does not only want to see the image of Black men reimagined now, but he also wants to leave behind a new story – a reinvention, if you will, of the metanarrative – a counternarrative that is handcrafted, fluid, demonstrates his commitment to social justice, and speaks to how ardently he teaches as an act of resistance.

Teaching As An Act Of Otherfathering

Ay yo,
Queens get the money, niggas still screaming, paper chasing
but presidential candidates is planning wars
with other nations over steak with masons
Pregnant teens give birth to intelligent gangsters - they daddies faceless
Play this by ya stomach,
let my words massage it and rub it
I'll be his daddy if there's nobody there to love it
Tell him his name Nasir,
tell him how he got here
Momma was just having fun with someone above her years (Jones, 2008)

The epigraph for this section of my findings comes from a rap song titled “Queens Get the Money” by Nas. The song plays in the background as I write; it is a short song—only 2 minutes and 17 seconds; it is raw and has no hook. This is the first verse that came to mind when I began crafting the section on otherfathering because in it, Nas asserts his willingness to take on the role of father for the unborn child with a “faceless”

father. He is willing to “otherfather” in the midst of a capitalist bureaucracy that is designed to maintain a social hierarchy in which the poor stay poor, and the rich get richer. I first read about the term “otherfathering” in Hunter, et.al’s 2006 article on fatherloss. In the article, the authors suggest that

a layer of otherfathers [exists] in Black communities that are important for the development of children and youth—particularly for males without fathers in their lives (Anderson, 1990, 1999; Stack, 1974). Without fathers to turn to, young men most often talked about the layer of otherfathers, which included brothers, brothers-in-law, grandfathers, uncles, and male mentors. (p. 439)

Otherfathering arose as another purpose in my study as the gentlemen talked about their purposes for becoming teachers. Sargent (2001) writes that “there is no single image of the male role model but several” (p.118). Therefore, I speak to the many faces of otherfathering: the faces that have presented themselves to me in this study via the words of my participants. The gentlemen in this study speak of their willingness to be “male mentors” for their students by being fathers to the fatherless; to be walking counternarratives for their students by offering holistic support in- and outside of school; to use Hip-Hop as a tool to engage and guide their students; to otherfather via positive expressions of “manhood”; and to weather the winds of otherfathering despite the tricks and difficulties that it incurs.

Being A Father To The Fatherless

The gentlemen in this study speak of being fathers to the fatherless, taking on the fatherhood role for children who do not have fathers in their lives in the physical or emotional realms. I say “physical or emotional realms” because two of the gentlemen in

this study (Mr. Porter and Minister Browne) had fathers at home who were emotionally absent. Though this emotionally absent facet did not become a major facet in this study, it is absolutely worthy of some discussion. Minister Browne explains

Then [there's] the kids that have fathers in the home, but they still don't know that their father loves them and things like that. I was a child that grew up and my father never said that he loved me. Never. (Browne, 2012, lines 104-107)

Even though, he had a father physically present in his home, Minister Browne still experienced fatherloss, and hence, recognizes the importance of his role as an otherfather. Mr. Porter also shares his thoughts on his father who was emotionally absent for many of his formative years.

I didn't want to be like him, and I don't want people to be like him. He just slept a lot throughout my entire childhood. I mean, he was on medicine and stuff, but...I didn't want younger men to be like that. I want them to be involved and active in the community. And how I had to do things on my own and stuff like that. I had to step up to the plate. (Porter, 2012, lines 163-167)

Rob Porter explains the importance of himself and other Black men being physically and emotionally present in the elementary classroom:

[T]he majority of young African-American males don't have a father figure in the house, so they don't have a male – they don't have the male influence in the house. So when they get a male influence in their life it means a lot to them. The fact that they're so close to them, it means a lot to them. Most of the times, they get exposed to a white male, but when they get exposed to an African-American male, they have that connection – “He Black like I'm Black. You look like me a little bit.” So they kinda sorta attach to them a little more. There's one young man in the 5th grade, I tutored him last year, but he still comes to me and acts like I'm his teacher from time to time: “Hey Mr. Porter! How you doing Mr. Porter? Mr. Porter, can I come to class with you today?” (Porter, 2012, lines 318-325)

The likenesses that he and the young Black boys at his school share serve as an important point of connection and a key element of otherfathering. Mr. Porter accepts this role as an otherfather because he recognizes that his students' ability to relate to him is essential to their success in school. Gibson (2009) concurs:

Most black male students are ridiculed when they exhibit pro-intellectual behavior, particularly by their peers. Moreover, these students are often made to feel "abnormal" by teachers who didn't expect such behavior, typically because of consciously or unconsciously internalized biases against Black males. Most of the "model" teachers Black male students are exposed to are negative toward them, even if it's only via seemingly benign low expectations as aforementioned, and don't look at all like them. (p. 17)

Gibson argues that the presence of more teachers who look like the students will positively impact the students, encouraging their success because they will have the opportunity to learn by observing other Black males being successful in academic spaces. Mr. Lucas concurs, describing the attitude of one of his Black male students:

Those 4 kids – they loved to see me every day, and then there was another little Black boy named Mikhail who was in another 4th grade class. He came down here from New York as well, from Brooklyn. He had his Brooklyn attitude. You know what I mean, (laughs) okay? He didn't take nothing off nobody; if you said something to him, he punched you in your mouth. You got too close to him, he'll tell you to get away from him. If you didn't, he punch him in his mouth. And...I mean..not saying that's just New York because that's how we were brought up down here, you know? If they don't leave you alone, you hit them and make them leave you alone, so I couldn't be mad at him for doing what he was taught, but at the same time, he needed someone to talk to keep himself out of trouble. And the White teachers, they didn't know how to talk to him, didn't know how to handle him. So every morning, he would come to my room first – speak to me and say, "What's up Mr. Lucas? What's going on?" I give him a little handshake, a hug. Talk to him a little bit like, "We're gonna have a good day today – no incidents." I will let his teacher know that if he was getting off task or too bad to send him to me. You know? "I'll talk to him to him for you, calm him down,

send him back, or what not, or he can just stay. We're doing the same things in our classes anyway." (Lucas, 2012, lines 233-246)

Though young Mikhail's behavior was unacceptable by traditional school standards, Mr. Lucas could understand and, even appreciate, his attitude towards others. It is Lucas' own experiences as a young man growing up on the streets of New York that give him the ability to relate to Mikhail in a way that is very similar to the Black male teachers in Lynn's November 2006 study. Lynn states, "the street becomes a rich resource from which teachers draw to make the curriculum more relevant to the everyday lives of their students" (Lynn, 2006, p.2508). Without having had his own experiences in "the street", Mr. Lucas may not be able to relate to Mikhail and help him to grow and make better life decisions. In a similar vein, Mr. Karlton Lattimer had an experience when he volunteered as a Big Brother. He explains how this work made him an otherfather.

I was a Big Brother for a couple of years to one of the kids there and had an opportunity to find out the kind of things he was going through and help guide him in a way to get him away from some of the same stuff that I was dealing with at the same time, at the same age, when I was a 12-13 year old. (Lattimer, 2012, lines 68-71)

Mr. Lattimer could relate to the children in this program and was able to use his previous experiences to help provide guidance and support. This thinking stayed with Mr. Lattimer when he became a teacher. Like Mikhail, Mr. Lattimer's mentees also needed a space in which "observational learning" could take place. Gibson (2009) describes this concept

Observational learning, also called social learning theory, occurs when the observer's behavior changes after viewing the behavior of the model. An observer's behavior can be affected by the positive or negative consequences – called vicarious reinforcement or vicarious punishment – of a model's behavior. When the model's behavior is rewarded, the observer is more likely to reproduce the rewarded behavior. When the model is punished, as example of vicarious punishment, the observer is less likely to reproduce the same behavior. (p. 17)

There is an old saying, "Children are like sponges." This is because children soak up information, learning how to behave by observing the models before them. Mr. Wise believes that students need a role model, a walking counternarrative, to serve as

someone for them to look up to , someone that is...uh...not that different from them when they grew up but can show them that you can be successful, and to be a positive Black male. I've taught mostly African-American students, so their expectations ...this is not the man that they see every day, but a successful man, what it means to be a man, and what it means to have good manners and be a good person, get along with everyone, and also to be professional. (Wise, 2012, lines 48-52)

In my experience, the girls were - they don't see a lot of positive Black men in their life, so they tend to actually gravitate towards you and follow in your steps. Not in terms of doing what you do, but watch you and learn from you a little more, like they need a big brother, uncle type of father role model. So they look for that within their teachers. (lines 57-60)

Wise's assertion here is that, both, his male and female students need more than someone *telling* what they should be doing or how they should be; they need to *see* someone doing the things and *being* the type of person that they know they can be. They need to see living examples of this possibility so that they can know the possibilities that lay ahead of them. In complete agreement, Minister Browne adds

I'm talking about the girls too. They don't see how a real man is supposed to act. Then they're going to fall for these knuckleheads and think that that's the only thing that's out there. He's not in jail; I guess he's the only thing I can choose from. It's kind of like they don't have much of an example either. (Browne, 2012, lines 570-573)

For Browne, girls do not need otherfathers in the same exact vein as boys do; he asserts that heterosexual girls need to see living examples of possible mates. The men in Sargent's study aligned with my findings. Sargent writes, "More of the teachers expressed the idea that they consciously constructed their presentation of self to girls and that this construction involved an element of counter-stereotyping" (p. 121). My support for this argument is evident in the fact that I, a Black woman and Hip-Hop feminist, have conducted a study that focuses on men teachers. However, an in depth exploration of girls in relation to Black men teachers is outside the scope of this dissertation but is a tremendous idea for future research. Nonetheless, Mr. Bowman takes this discussion another step further. He explains

I think that the presence of Black male teachers definitely has an impact on boys because students automatically assume that because we appear the same in some ways, that you can offer me something because you understand where I'm coming from...so they automatically assume that. Now the greater question becomes *what impact is that teacher making?* And in the end, it doesn't matter if he's male, female, Black, White, Asian, Hispanic. Then, it really becomes what your mission is as a person. You know, what are you trying to do? And so I think that an effective African-American male teacher will make an extreme impact on the lives of boys. I think that an ineffective teacher will make an extreme impact on the lives of boys, but if we're talking about, you know, raising up a child in the way they should go, then we definitely need some *effective* African-American males in the classroom. (Bowman, 2012, lines 203-212, emphasis mine)

This is the art of otherfathering. Mr. Bowman is adamant that the concept of helping to improve the status of Black boys in schools is not just about Black men teachers. For Bowman, children need effective and committed teachers. However, he also admits that “effective African-American male teachers” *are indeed* necessary in the classroom if we want to “raise up a child in the way they should go”. In other words, though Black men teachers are not the only teachers who can make a positive impact on boys, Black men teachers are necessary as walking counter-narratives – if we hope to challenge and transform the dominant narrative.

Being A Walking Counternarrative

In order to challenge the dominant narrative, these men, as otherfathers must become those walking counternarratives that their students so desperately need. Mr. Lattimer expounds that becoming a teacher meant more for him than teaching academic lessons. He became a teacher because he wanted to

be a role model for the kids, first of all. I wanted to be able to create an environment for the kids where they felt connected, cared for and capable. I wanted to create an environment where, or a class that, if it was my kid in that classroom, if my kid was there would I want that teacher teaching my kid. Those are my expectations and I think I’ve done that. Once you have those, a kid that’s connected to you and is capable, if you have a kid that’s connected to you, and you have a kid that believes that they are capable of doing the work, that’s half the battle. (Lattimer, 2012, lines 113-122)

The art of otherfathering involves creating “an environment for kids where they feel connected, cared for, and capable.” By giving his students the care and support they need, Mr. Lattimer is addressing fatherlessness by providing them with a “father” in place of their biological fathers. By relating to his students on the basis of gender,

Benjamin Robinson also strives to create a comfortable environment for his students. He shares a story of an incident at his school:

a lot of things that go on with boys that I catch, and I say, “Oh, he’s just being a boy.” And teachers get on me all the time because they want to jump down a boy’s throat sometimes for things that they doing or saying or commenting on. I don’t jump on them like that and they say, “Aren’t you going to get on them about such and such?”, and I’m like, “No. They just being a boy. He just told you he thought the girl was pretty: just saying it in his own way.” For example, a boy the other day came up to me saying he really like this one particular girl. He was like, “Man, look at her; she’s pretty, and she got a nice butt”, and the teachers were jumping all down him like he offended her, and I was saying, “Calm down.” I mean, he is allowed to be a boy. I mean what you want him to say? (laughs) Ya know...this is elementary. He was a fifth grader....

This was a couple of weeks ago. The kid was out on the playground. The Pre-K playground is next to the big kids’ playground, so I was standing in my section but talking to another teacher while watching and monitoring. And the kid came up to me and was like, “Hey Mr. Robinson, she’s just pretty man”, and I said, “I see you keep chasing her all around this playground.” You know I kinda joke around with them like that a little bit, and the teachers are like, “We don’t encourage those types of things”, and I said, “It’s going to happen. *So, either you be somebody that they can feel comfortable with and able to talk to them about it, and then when the time comes to educate them on when and what to do and not to say, you can do that better than versus somebody where they kinda shed themselves off from you, then I’ll tell you, you won’t know anything, then you can’t prevent nothing.* But him commenting on some girl and how pretty she is, you can’t get mad at him for that.” But some teachers don’t know how to handle that because they see sex, and at the end of the day, it’s just a little boy crushing; that’s all it is. We all do it. We all do it.

Sometimes, I’m a reminder to them that it’s ok. I mean, they do have the right to be little boys and little girls. And sometimes, I don’t think that women understand that they’re just being little boys you know? It’s just like a man being a man. How do I put it? It’s not a bad or a good thing; it’s just a man being a man at that time you know? It’s just how one of those things where it’s going to be said and done differently regardless. Little boys are just going to do somethings that you just not gonna understand. You know, it’s the same thing with little girls, they are gonna do somethings that I’m not gonna understand. (Robinson, 2012, lines 260-279, emphasis mine)

Robinson shares this story to express the importance of relating to students. The gender differences become an issue when (in Robinson's eyes) one gender does not "understand" the other, or even make the attempt to "understand" the other. However, I believe his key point here is that it is crucial that he build the kind of relationship with the young man that makes the boy feel comfortable. Like Mr. Lattimer, Mr. Robinson wants his students to feel "connected, cared for, and capable", and he supports this by being a sounding board for the fifth grader to share his affection for his female counterpart. This idea of creating space for students to feel connected speaks to Minister Jovan Browne as well. He adds, "if any child can come talk to me, then that's a victory, and I praise God for that because that's what I'm here for" (Browne, 2012, lines 115-116). Even further, Mr. Lattimer affirms that his role in the classroom is, indeed, an otherfather who provides room for his students to enjoy a safe place for open dialogue.

[I]f I'm in a role where some of them may not have their fathers in their household, or have a situation where they could come and talk to me about some things they couldn't talk to their mothers about or to brothers about or whatever, I think that's big. I think it's not just for black boys or black girls, I think it's important for white boys and white girls to see a black male in an authoritative position....Yes, it's important. I never had a black male in elementary school. I'm sure that it brings about something psychologically with all the kids. I hear that a lot, but maybe it's just the presence of being there, being able to understand some of their situations or some of the things they may be going through. (Lattimer, 2012, lines 245-254)

The dearth of Black men elementary school teachers matters to Mr. Lattimer, and he, like Mr. Wise, feels that it matters to his students: regardless of race or gender. I find it particularly interesting that he mentions that the students may sometimes need to talk to him about things that "they couldn't talk to their mothers" or other family members

about. This concept is clearly what otherfathering is about. Hunter, et.al. report that in their study young Black men rely on otherfathers for this kind of support. Benjamin Robinson elaborates on this concept:

I found a lot of them don't have fathers, so you end up becoming that male figure, that male role model by default; automatically not even just with the Pre-K, the rest of the kids at the school they know you the only man there. They see you. They know where you are, what classes you are. So teachers are always sending older kids down to the classroom 'cause they need to talk. One thing I learned from going back to the teachers is sometimes you just got to grab up these kids boys or girls and hug 'em cause they don't get it anywhere else. (Robinson, 2012, lines 209-213)

Mr. Wise also supports this idea. He talks of the comfort that elementary-age students find in his presence in the classroom:

The presence is, you know, I guess it's a bit more comforting for those who don't see it at home, or see it in terms of their fathers, or just in different walks of life, so yeah I think it's definitely...a bigger impact, especially at the elementary level....(Wise, 2012, lines 73-75)

... in elementary, they're just aiming to please more because they're just happy to see that you may just inadvertently fill a void in that student's life that they don't see. (lines 80-82)

Again, here is the recognition and acknowledgement that as Black men in the elementary school, they are among the first walking counternarratives that many children may have encountered. The men in Sargent's 2001 study "describe obligations that they feel are associated with being the first male teacher for children" (p.118). Several of the gentlemen in my study share this sense of obligation in children's lives and express that they find it to be a meaningful and an empowering existence for them. They felt like

superheroes when they began teaching in the elementary school because of how the students, staff, and families looked up to them. Mr. Lucas experienced the awed attention as well. The first day he began teaching, he shares that “the kids didn’t know me, [but] they flocked right to me” (Lucas, 2012, lines 226-227). Mr. Mitchell explains the difference for him between teaching in the middle school and teaching in the elementary school. He states,

But elementary school, it was because they loved what I was doing. I was like the superhero. I came in to save the day, so it was cool. It was like young people who were younger than me, loved what I was doing, and uhm...it was really that. It started off as maybe a little vain, a little “Mr. Mitchell is cool, so he’s a big tall superman. He got it – save the day.” (Mitchell, 2012, lines 47-50)

Being big and tall was only a small piece of the wonder of Mr. Mitchell. I believe that Mr. Mitchell’s commitment to transforming education and to being a “facilitator of knowledge” who encourages students to “take risks” is the largest aspect of his superhero powers. Mitchell further explains why his students are so in awe with him. He explains that

[W]hat is required of you goes beyond the scope of what’s written as your job description. Who you are as a role model and being a male figure in the lives of children means that you’re taking more than just the regular teaching gig. You have to be relevant to the kids that are in your room. And you represent so many things, not only to the kids, but to the parents and everyone else because, ultimately,...you’re providing our families with ...a gatekeeper, someone who you know is there to protect integrity in the community, the integrity of the children who are there to learn and who really want to thrive. You are there to provide the families with an understanding of this practice and this thing about education. So you are also teaching the families, and they can embrace you better than sometimes they may other people because they know that ultimately you understand the struggle of the things that are going on and the dynamic. And so they don’t necessarily feel threatened that a brother [pauses]...that a brother who

comes in and is sharing some information with you in regards to academic achievement or whatever it may be that you are also providing an opportunity for the community to be a better place to be. (Mitchell, 2012, lines 285-299)

He takes his position as an otherfather very seriously, and in this role, Mr. Mitchell readily takes on the entire family and their community. This focus on family is substantial as it helps to drive *how* he formulates his role as an otherfather. Moreover, Mr. Robinson explains how his students' parents encourage this undertaking:

I'm often asked by parents to take their kids home with me and discipline them as if they're mine. One of these days I may take a parent up on that. But for now, I just focus on living a good life and hope that I can be an example of someone who tried to be positive and do the right things. I am currently the God Father of two of my friends' daughters. I go visit them as often as possible because I know that their dads are not in their life like that at all. I can only hope to learn something about kids now so that when that day comes for me to be a real father, I'll be somewhat equipped with an idea on what moral basis I'll raise them. (FBFG, 2012, p.6)

Mr. Robinson is one of six men in this study who do not have any biological children of his own. I find it compelling that he enjoys teaching as a way of preparing for parenthood. For Mr. Robinson, otherfathering is a mutually symbiotic relationship. He gains from otherfathering as much as the children do.

Hip-Hop: A Tool Of The Otherfather

During the FBFG, the gentlemen discuss utilizing Hip-Hop as a tool to help them reach their students. As the culture to which most of their students subscribe and the music to which most of their students listen, Hip-Hop became a major topic of conversation throughout this study. For Mr. Wise, otherfathering is a pathway for him to challenge young people about their conceptions of Hip-Hop.

Their response is typically that these rappers aren't "hot" or what's popular. After I Smh [shake my head] at that, I just try to challenge them to listen for artists who don't actually glorify negative things in their lyrics because life isn't all about negative aspects or an actual struggle. (FBFG, 2012, p.6)

In a similar vein, Mr. Bowman shares how he utilizes Hip Hop as a way to connect with students. He explains:

I used Hip-Hop as both a tool to engage students but as a tool to help students understand that we need to expand our minds because I understand that music is something that we listen to repeatedly. Everything that you put in your system is gonna come out back in some other way, shape, or form. So I help them understand some positive Hip-Hop, and we talk about Hip-Hop that wasn't positive with them because they brought it to the classroom. And then, I also exposed them to different cultures of music because I didn't want my students to become single-minded in their music intellect. That's one of the things that I find in the African-American community; music is a big thing for us, but we gotta use it the correct way. Certain things in music we just can't accept, so I use them for both part. (Bowman, 2012, lines 241-250)

Once he has connected with his students, Mr. Bowman takes the opportunity to expand their horizons by exposing them to different cultures and by sharing with them the aspects of Hip-Hop that he finds unacceptable. Likewise, Mr. Boyd utilizes the opportunity to utilize Hip-Hop as a way to not only to get to challenge young people's thinking but also as a way to get to know what is on their minds.

I have found myself listening to Hip Hop not just for my pleasure but to also find what our youth are listening to. I try to give the kids something different from what they are used to and comfortable with. (FBFG, 2012, p.7)

Mr. Wise takes this perspective on Hip-Hop a step further. He says, "I believe young men are led astray by hip hop often [because they] have no one there to help distinguish

between fact and fiction” (FBFG, 2012, p.12). This idea of otherfathers serving to help distinguish between fact and fiction is not specific to only Mr. Wise. For Mr. Robinson, Hip-Hop has value in his classroom because he can use it to help pre-kindergarten students understand fact versus fiction. He explains,

I listen to Hip Hop and R&B for my personal enjoyment as well. But I don't use it to teach skills but maybe life concepts, if at all. For the most part, I'm quicker to point out the fantasy of a rap song and point out the reality in some of those situations, or I listen to keep myself updated with the language and the messages that they are picking up. Just the other day I asked a kid to tell me his "ABC", and he starts to RAP IT to me. I asked him to then point out the letter "G" on my word wall, and he couldn't tell me. So I said, you can rap the "ABC'S" and even sing the song...but you can't point out the letter's yet. (HE'S 3 BTW). I said who taught you how to rap the "ABC'S"? He says, No One..I wanted to make up a rap song, so the "ABC'S" is the first thing that came to mind!!! Now you all tell me, do I have Rap star or a Prodigy in the making? I just taught him how to write the letters in his name on last Mon (June 18), and today (June 26) he's writing his name. He won't be in pre-k until next year 2014. This kid is at my daycare. I think Rap music inspires its own inspiration with in kids. It's up to us to turn it into something positive...or at least try to do that. (FBFG, 2012, p.7)

In his role as an otherfather, Benjamin Robinson turns his and his students' interactions with Hip-Hop into teachable moments, helping his students to utilize the artistry in rap music to their benefit. Minister Browne concurs with the benefits of rap music and Hip-Hop. Furthermore, in his role as an otherfather, he highlights the spiritual and cultural characteristics within it. He explains:

I use slang, hip sayings, and figurative language to get points across in Science. The use of imagery to connect urban life, suburban life, and education is a great thing to do. It helps the students to express themselves in ways and terms that are beneficial to them. I think that we spend too much time trying to make our youth into what we want them to be and not what they want to be and what they are good at. The scripture tells us in Proverbs 22:6 that we are to train up the children in the ways that they should go. The ways are not our ways but God's way. Each

one is blessed with particular gifts and talents. Hip Hop has always been about self-expression, and despite the beefs over the years, self-respect and awareness. The English language is the hardest to learn in the world, and because our words can have so many different meanings, context dictates what is being conveyed. The world wanted to ignore hip hop because it came from us. It was in a vernacular that the masses could not follow, but how is that any different from the drums, calls, songs, and chants of our ancestors? We are a people that have been set a part by God Almighty. It is not just about rhyming; it is about educating and mentoring. What is cool to these kids is that you listen to them. Once you have them, they will do anything that you teach them to do” (FBFG, 2012, p.8).

I find Minister Browne’s perspective here particularly intriguing. The way he weaves in and out of cultural and religious context, it is as if Hip-Hop is a spiritual experience for him. He fearlessly embodies this experience and brings it to the classroom as an integral part of his role as an otherfather, and through his own love for Hip-Hop, he is able to deeply connect with his students. Many of the gentlemen in this study are using Hip-Hop as a way to build bridges and bridge gaps, to help them relate to students, and then, to help them develop these relationships. The men also discuss how the negative aspects of Hip-Hop drive their desires to serve as otherfathers as well. Victor Lucas explains the importance of Black men in the classroom:

In all honesty a lot of these youth only have the males they see in videos and hear on the radio to guide them, so we as black males need to show our youngsters there is more to life than being a gangsta and making drug money. Show them it's not cool to go to jail. (FBFG, 2012, p.10)

This form of mentoring is essential for all students, especially Black boys, who tend to lack access to walking counternarratives. Rob Porter responds to Lucas’ statement and extends the argument further:

This is how I feel completely. The young males in school have no role models; they don't have love shown to them, so they go and try to find things to fill the void in their hearts. They don't have the love they need shown to them from a father. They have mothers trying to pour into them as much as they can, but they can only do so much. Without the fatherly love given to them, they lack the support and affirmation they need. They don't have the father figure to tell them, "No not this way son but that way." Fathers can do so much without even knowing it. So they [boys] go to gangs, look at the videos, and use these things to fill the void - all because they don't have a father in the house to lead the way. I believe [that's] the solution because without fathers, the responsibility falls back on us in the class and us just as black males. We, as males, have the responsibility to tell them, "No son not that way but this way." That falls back on us. (FBFG, 2012, p.10)

Otherfathering is a responsibility that requires trust between the student and teacher as well as a familial connection. Victor Lucas embraces this mentoring role through his engagement with Hip Hop, his students' families, and extra-curricular activities with his students. He shares:

One thing I do is get some of the boys together and hang out outside of school, at their rec league games, and take them to the university to see for themselves there's more to being black than rapping and dealing. I try to build relationships with the parents as well so they'll trust me to take their kids outside of school. (FBFG, 2012, p.10)

Mr. Lucas exposes his Black male students to a world outside of rap music and drug-dealing. He acknowledges that getting involved in the students' lives outside of school helps them to have an improved self-confidence, and, in turn, they become better students.

Otherfathers: Positive Expressions Of “Manhood”

Like Mr. Lucas, Minister Browne also engages in extra-curricular excursions with his students, especially his Black male students. He explains a recent outing in which he and a few of the other teachers and parents at his school participated.

[W]e all got our sons and boys that didn't have fathers in the household, and we took them to a baseball game just to have an outing, just to have some fun. Just so these boys can see with their own eyes and experience that they have brothers, fathers, mentors, pastors, teachers that are doing the right thing and that actually care about their well-being. Then, I'm going to take it even further because I'm putting together a boys' and mens' group where we do just that. We talk to these boys. We counsel them. We take them on trips. We tell them the value of education. We tell them the value of spirituality. We help them understand that life has a real critical meaning for them, especially in this country. You being a black boy and soon to be a black man, you have to defy all the odds. You should do it with a smile on your face because we don't have to walk around angry and upset that the world wants to disrespect us. (Browne, 2012, lines 83-94)

Through otherfathering, Minister Browne helps provide a space for his students to *see* men in their lives who are doing “the right thing”. They help them to see that they can become well-rounded, well-adjusted adults, regardless of their current circumstances. It is through the act of otherfathering, that the gentlemen in this study go about teaching their Black male students about a life and about a manhood that is very different than what they most often see in rap videos. Hunter. et.al. explain a connection between otherfathers and manhood:

As one young man commented, “I grew up around my granddad and uncles in the family. And I learned [about being a man]. I teach myself. I can go around people and pick up on something I need to know.” According to Elijah Anderson (1990, 1999), these natural mentors are called “old heads” in some urban Black communities. They assist and guide boys in the transition to respectable manhood. (Hunter, et al., 2006, p. 439)

After being asked by another participant, Mr. Porter offers an explanation of how he defines “manhood”:

...being a father, an uncle, a brother, and a friend, but at the same time, being a strong teacher to teach all the students the right way to go, while being you. Being well articulated, knowing your core values and not departing from them, being consistent, being a leader in all areas of the school. Not leading the way in all things, but being a leader by having your hand involved in the process, and helping as much as you can, knowing your limits.

The main thing is having a standard that is not moved for any reason, being confident in yourself while showing the students how to be confident in themselves, and most importantly by knowing who you are! We have to be well studied in this profession in so many ways, so whenever any situation comes at us we know how to handle it with tactfulness.

I tell you, with my father not being active my whole life, there was a certain level of confidence I lacked in being a man, I knew how to preform to get attention, but being a man I didn't know how to be that. I could use my body to get attention from the ladies, I was strong, so I could get respect from men, but being a man to me meant more than that.

A teacher knew my potential but didn't know all the struggles I had on the inside. She motivated me to become a teacher, so I ran after it and got a scholarship for it, but I didn't know how to be a man. I knew how to be a lot of things that made up a man, but [that] still didn't really define me as a man. The fact that I could bench 350 [lbs] didn't define me as man; the fact that I was ranked in the nation in a few sports didn't define me as a man. All the girls I messed with didn't define me as a man. Even though men do these things, these things alone don't define a man; it's just something different men do. I wrapped myself up in thinking I was a man because of what I did, not from who I am, until it was getting close to me becoming a teacher. I saw that I didn't know how really to be a man, I had the activities but not the true mindset of a man! (FBFG, 2012, p.14)

In the midst of his thorough definition of manhood, Rob Porter offers personal examples that illustrate that, for him, manhood is much more than an expression of biological assignment. It is more than a simple expression of gender. “Manhood” is defined by

one's mindset instead of actions. Furthermore, he describes this learning about manhood as it pertains to students and to himself becoming a teacher:

My kids were calling me this year the "School House Father" LOL. Yeah, I was mean and I didn't show much remorse, but they respected me. I say one thing: it was hard for me my first few years in education, 'cause not having a father figure, I didn't know how to be a man in the class the correct way. I was blessed to have a male teacher my last semester before graduating, and he showed me how to be a man in the elementary school. (FBFG, 2012, p.13)

Like his own students, Mr. Porter's lessons on otherfathering began when he was a student. He also talks about an otherfather in his family: his brother-in-law. He says that his brother-in-law is a major part of his survival and success.

My brother-in-law: he was actually there for me all throughout high school. If it wasn't for my brother-in-law, I can say that I probably wouldn't be here because when I was in high school, I was big in sports. I was..., my senior year, doing the Teaching Fellows application process. It was during wrestling season also, and the first time that they had the State interviews, I had a wrestling tournament, and then the week after when they had the re-schedules and stuff like that. My mother, she said she'll take me (laughs), but the day it came, she said, "I couldn't take you." So I called my brother, I called my brother-in-law. I say he's my brother. But I called my brother-in-law at the last moment. When I called him, he was sleep (laughs). I woke him up! It was by the grace of God that he woke up. He was like, "Rob, what you need?" I was like, "I need to be there in about 3 hours, and my momma, she won't take me." "Alright, I'll come over there, and I'll take you." He took me over there, and from there it's a wrap. (Porter, 2012, lines 184-193)

Mr. Porter's brother-in-law's unquestioning support means the world to him; he credits this experience with the reason why he is where he is today. The brother-in-law's otherfathering set the tone for their relationship and provided Mr. Porter with the support and guidance that he needed at that exact time. Mr. Bowman shares a similar experience

with otherfathers. His introduction to the Call Me Mister program served as his first exposure to otherfathers.

I was meeting with those guys because in my time, it was very rare – even unheard of – to see a room full of African-American males discussing something positive, let alone talking about changing the face of America’s classrooms. So uhm...I just thought that “Hey, this is a great thing, and there’s no way that I’m going to miss this opportunity to be a part of it.” And I got joined with Call Me Mister. I got linked with some great guys, who are some great leaders and still role models for me to this day.... I learned more and more, established good relationships, and I became better as a person, and you know. I am grateful to be able to share the opportunity with my family and my students on a daily basis. (Bowman, 2012, lines 76-84)

Like the support Mr. Porter’s brother-in-law gave to him, the gentlemen in Call Me Mister provided Mr. Bowman with the mentorship and guidance he needed to become a “better person”. Mr. Lucas also recalls an experience with an otherfather when he was in middle school. His middle school football coach provided him with the kind of support that encouraged him to perform at a higher level.

[M]y football coach and math teacher in 7th and 8th grade was Coach M - same guy both years - and he was the one that really made me feel good about what I was doing in math and made me strong, like he always praised me. And the fact that I was really good in football made it even better, so I got a lot of compliments from him. I always had A’s in his class, so that made me real strong in math. And then, it made me want to help out also because he would let me go and help the other students in the lower grades as well. In high school, since I already felt real confident in math, I did well. (Lucas, 2012, lines 17-22)

The mentoring that Mr. Lucas received from his coach was an integral part of his growth and helped him to become a confident student. In addition, he was greatly influenced by

the only Black male teacher that he ever had, his high school geography teacher and football coach, Coach D.

He was a good guy. He was one of the people who told me I could do anything I wanted. Other than my mom, he was the one who wanted me to be a teacher. He wanted me to go into this, but I wanted money. I didn't want to be a teacher.... But Coach D was the one who told me I could do anything. (Lucas, 2012, lines 36-41)

In Mr. Lucas' experience, it was this Black male teacher and coach who encouraged him to become a Black male teacher. It is to be duly noted that five out of the nine gentlemen (Lattimer, Lucas, Wise, Porter, and Robinson) in this study make mention of having athletic coaches at some point in their lives who otherfathered them in some way. In his book *What a Coach Can Teach a Teacher* (2010), Duncan-Andrade explains that "there are practical instructional strategies used in coaching that teachers can make use of in the classroom" (p.50). It is evident that this was certainly the case for a young Mr. Lucas, as he assures us that his grades improved as a result of the confidence that his coach helped him to build. On the same note, Mr. Lattimer asserts his experience as teacher and a coach and strongly asserts the powerful connection between the two:

The two go hand-in-hand. You have to have a plan for what you're doing. I mean, I couldn't be a teacher if I didn't coach first. It taught me how to handle groups of kids. That's been the biggest thing that's been a part of my whole development dealing with kids. (Lattimer, 2012, lines 370-372)

For Mr. Lattimer, being a coach has helped him to be an effective teacher and has prepared him to be an effective otherfather as well. Experiences with otherfathers helped Mr. Bowman to get to a place in his own life in which he could feel comfortable helping

others. For Mr. Bowman, it was important for him to “pay it forward” and be an example for those children who do not have access to walking counternarratives. He states, “I knew that I would be a guy, or an African-American male that a lot of kids had never been exposed to, and so my goal was to set the best possible example that I could be” (Bowman, 2012, lines 144-146). Mr. Lucas agrees that his role in the classroom is immense. He explains that his role in the classroom is all-encompassing:

I am like a father, a big brother. I mean, not only am I their teacher, but I have to be a guidance counselor, somebody they can talk to, and it's just – my group? I have some kids here that have maybe three outfits, you know? And I have others that have military families, so they have everything they need, and then there's those same ones who their dads are gone, and they're at war, and they haven't seen their dad in over a year, you know? I had a little girl just break out crying just the other day saying she misses her dad. Every role you can think of as a guy, except for a chef because I don't cook for them, at all. I gave them some of my strawberries (points to container of strawberries on desk and laughs), but that's as far as I've gone. And of course, protector, but that comes from me – the way I grew up. I've always been protective of people I care about, so no one bothers my students – 4th graders or teachers. (Lucas, 2012, lines 178-187)

Mr. Lucas is clear about how important his students are to him. The relationship that he has with them is definitely familial. If it were not, then he would not be so protective of his students. Mr. Mitchell concurs with this concept of being a protector for his students as well. He says

It is not written, but it is understood that when you walk into that classroom, you may serve as a male role model. You are the surrogate father. You are the man, the protector in a sense, because ultimately, when my students look at me, there are times when they want that hug to know it's okay. They want guidance to say it's ok. They want to be coached through whatever they're going through. They don't want to be placated. They don't want you to substitute anyone, but they definitely want to know that there is a male who can affirm who they are as

children as learners, as leaders, as part of the community. (Mitchell, 2012, lines 168-172)

As an otherfather, Mr. Mitchell finds himself affirming students as “learners” and “leaders”. Mr. Porter adds to this conversation a very similar perspective on otherfathering in the classroom. He also admits that he is willing to be whatever his students need him to be when it comes to helping them be successful. He explains

I know a lot of young African-American males don't have father figures, so [I'll be] a father if I have to. It touched me because a few weeks ago, one of the young men in this school, one of the young men in my class, came up to me and was like, “Mr. Porter, you know what my momma said? She said you like a father here at the school- that you take care of all the young Black boys. Mr. Porter, you our father at school?” I was like, “Well, uh I ain't never think about it like that, but I mean, I'm whatever I gotta be. You know what I'm saying?” I'm saying for the kids because some don't got fathers, some don't have bigger brothers, some don't have uncles, some don't have whatever they need, you know what I'm saying, to get them through. So I mean, if it's a listening ear, whatever, a man, whatever position, whatever male position they're lacking in life, I can be that position.

Even to the point if they're not lacking anything, well I'm your teacher, so I'm your first, well I wouldn't say first because they got a second grade male teacher, but I'm your first Black male teacher. So I mean, whatever I gotta be, I'm a step up and be it for you, to help you get through whatever you need to get through. So I mean, overall, I think that's my role. And one of the biggest things is shaping them for the future. I mean making sure they're prepared to go out there and do their best and shine. You know what I'm saying?

Not only is it one of the goals of the teaching profession, but me myself, it was one of my personal goals before I even came into ...before I actually started teaching. I started downloading things into my mind, starting an afterschool program to make sure that they're continuing on, starting enrichment programs after school and stuff like that to make sure that they're actually using all their gifts and talents, you know what I'm saying, to better themselves, accessing those gifts that they have that so many people have tried to put in dormant, you know what I'm saying? And then also, whenever they get up to the high school level, their junior going into that senior year, [I want to] try [to] to take them on a trip around to see different colleges, exposing them. One of my biggest things, one

the biggest visions that God gave me in college was having like an enrichment program with the kids, so whenever they come to the program and providing different activities for them whether it's, well, we're going to the zoo, or we're going to New York, or we're going somewhere, you know what I'm saying, exposing them to different opportunities they will never be exposed to in their regular lives and stuff like that. (Porter, 2012, lines 237-261)

Mr. Porter's vision is to be able to supply students with whatever and to be whomever they need him to be at a given moment. His ideas on developing afterschool and enrichment programs speak to this vision. These ideas also speak to the important topic of exposure. Not only does Mr. Porter see himself otherfathering his students and being various expressions of manhood for them, he also sees the need for them to be exposed to "different opportunities". Mr. Bowman adds,

[T]he first thing is to provide students to be exposed to things that are gonna help them be better as a person. I can teach math all day, but if it's not connected to anything that's gonna help them out or help them understand, then it's worthless. They're gonna forget it. You know? Brain research says if you don't connect one thing to another, then it's gonna vanish. So I knew right off the bat that I wanted to give them something useful that's gonna be lifelong. But in doing that, even if I'm so good in my 5 hours, I gotta remember that it's 24 hours in the day. That means another 19. I gotta make my 5 so great that they have to make the other 19 great. And in doing that, I gotta know that if I'm dealing with a 5th grader, that's a pretty hefty responsibility to make 19 other hours of your day great because you already feel like you're not in control, so I gotta start dealing with the other components of your life. I gotta start dealing with your sports team. I gotta start dealing with your parents or your grandparents. I gotta deal with the other teachers in the school that you communicate with because they all impact your life in some shape, form, or fashion. And if I do not do that, then I'm doing you a disservice because, *again*, it's about the well-being of the child, but the only way the child could be well is if the child has a healthy community, and a healthy community has to include all parts of the community. It can't be just one portion. (Bowman, 2012, lines 165-179)

Mr. Bowman elaborates that his role as otherfather includes collaborating with the community to support the student. Additionally, the exposure to opportunities that “are gonna help them be better” is key. Mr. Porter also expresses his desire to increase the exposure that is students are receiving by bringing walking counternarratives into his school building as further expressions and examples of manhood.

There is a principal up in East Orange New Jersey, Baruti K. Kafele. I really look up to this guy. I read his book *Motivating Black Males to Achieve in School and in Life*, and in this book, he shows different ways that we can reach our young black males. One thing that I really want to do next year and the years to come, for the young black males in our school, is have a monthly assembly for the guys and bring in a strong male role-model from our community. It doesn't matter about their profession, but the main thing is that they are real about life, and they share their struggles in life in a way that is encouraging. (FBFG, 2012, p.11)

In response, Brandon Robinson adds,

Rob Porter, I think the things you described are the exact journeys all men travel when trying to figure out the definition of man and how that relates to our own lives. I, too, struggled somewhat with the concept from time to time, and my father was in my life actively 100%. I saw some things growing up, but I'll tell you most things my dad made me or let me figure out on my own. His thing was to raise me and make sure I had what I needed. He allowed me to make my own decisions but for the most part that quest to man hood was my own journey to make. (FBFG, 2012, p.11)

Even with the presence of an active father, Robinson acknowledges that the journey to manhood is not easy. Jovan Browne offers some insight on what Black men can do to help expedite this journey:

[Stay] true to the calling... That is so powerful! Also looking in the mirror. We have to emulate exactly what we want these boys to be. If we are educated, let it shine. If we are believers of Christ, let it shine. If we respect women, let it shine.

If we care about our people and others, let it shine. We have a huge undertaking, and it comes with enormous pressure. We also have to be realists because we cannot save everyone. Hip Hop is our connection to taking these youth much further, but we cannot fall victim to it either.

We should be able to meet these kids where they are. A strong man cannot be hindered in any way. We are losing the battle because we are not allowed to really be ourselves. (FBFG, 2012, pp.11-13)

Minster Browne offers sound advice: the idea of letting one's vulnerabilities shine so that they can be a lesson for another. This is a powerful proclamation because it goes against the social mores of the heteronormative "manhood" that Mr. Porter and Mr. Robinson reference. Browne also shares his frustration with the boundaries of teaching in an American school system. This speaks directly to the "trick of otherfathering": a sense of not being able to be one's full self because of the fear (and historical experience) that society will not accept who you are.

The Trick Of Otherfathering

Going against social mores is a common theme amongst the data I collected throughout this study. Several of the gentlemen felt that their role included stepping outside of the box and taking risks so that the students could gain experiences that exceeded those provided by sanctioned curriculum. Mr. Porter explicates this idea as he describes the most challenging thing about teaching elementary school:

I would have to say balancing everything and teaching the real stuff that needs to be taught. Well, let me reword that, I would say being creative enough to embed social lessons into the busy days we have: having that time to teach life skills. There is but only so much you can do being an example. Then, it's very sticky when you try to over extend yourself cause it can be taken the wrong way. I found this year that when I did things that were border line to me losing my job if administration found out, that's when students responded the most. Not anything

illegal or anything, but giving students money for lunch or talking to kids about their beliefs and what they believe and stuff like that. (FBFG, 2012, p.12)

The work of otherfathering requires more than just being a role model; it requires one to be a walking counternarrative. It requires being willing to put one's own job on the line in an effort to provide students with the kinds of experiences that prepare them for the world outside of the school building. This is the trick of otherfathering. Mr. Boyd concurs that his job as a teacher includes much more than teaching. He states his role as a Black man elementary school teacher is to

help educate them on subjects about life. I feel that I'll do a disservice to students to just leave them and not teach them about some of the things that they will see in life. I teach second graders, you know, so they're seven and eight years old, so I don't really get deep into it, but again, I try to show light about the real world – you know, how things are in the real world. (Boyd, 2012, lines 60-64)

As an otherfather, Mr. Boyd aims to provide his students with more than the classic curriculum: he wants to give them the guidance to be able to survive in the “real world”. This is the art of otherfathering. He also wants to expose them to careers in teaching. A sentiment in agreement with Gibson (2009) and Noguera (2008), that young African-American males just don't frequently see education as a viable profession. Boyd states:

part of my role I feel is to help younger men, African-American men, to tell them and show them that, you know, that you can become a teacher. It's a good profession. Uhm...and there's a lot of happiness that comes from being an educator. (Boyd, 2012, lines 73-75)

The guidance Boyd seeks to provide goes beyond academic support; it reaches the outer limits of helping young people create the kinds of lives that they will find rewarding.

Otherfathering is not an easy task; it is serious work. For Mr. Mitchell,

being the perpetual role model is a challenge, in addition to the unexpected assumptions that you are a "father figure" "mentor" and more. Sometimes it weighs heavy on me when I see our sistahs [sic] struggling to figure out what to do with our young people! I have been in the teaching game for eleven years, and it gets more and more challenging! (FBFG, 2012, p.13)

Mr. Mitchell weighs in that one of the difficulties of otherfathering is watching Black women ("sistahs") struggle on their own to help the youth. Mr. Robinson responds about his efforts to support the women teachers in his school and be a "father figure" to his students.

Also to that "Father Figure" comment...I am 1 of 4 males in my school, many of the teachers preferred to send their students down to my room as disciplinary action. At first, I was unsure as to what I was supposed to be saying to these kids when they were sent to me, but as time went on, I quickly realized that I was deemed the "man" figure in the school, and that I needed to deal with them in a more stern and "tough love" kind of way. I didn't mind the task, but I also made sure that while I was administrating discipline to them, they understood why I was and why their actions were unacceptable. After a while, most kids got wind of what happens when they came to see me, but the ones that did eventually understood that they couldn't continue to deal with me in that capacity. However, when I'm good with you, I reward every kid I see with a High Five vs a Thump to the head. The kids know that my thump to the head means that they have been talked about to me and are not far from being sent to my room. And everyone knows if I can't get through to a kid then it meant it was time for a trip to the principal and a free pass home for 10 days.

Being a teacher is challenging because it's not just teaching we are charged with dealing with. When you teach, you're investing in a kid's life not just the book lessons we teach them. (FBFG, 2012, p.15)

Mr. Robinson's decision to take on the support role for his female counterparts was not immediate. However, his desire to otherfather includes collaborating with his peers as they work to help children. Minister Browne also speaks on this concept. He agrees and adds,

For me, when I walk these halls, all these kids know me, whether I taught them or not. They're like, "Hey Mr. Browne. How you doing Mr. Browne? How you doing Minister Browne? Nice to see you." They could be acting up, I come around the corner and they see me. Their teacher could be standing right there. They're all standing at attention and then try to put on a smile and wave at me like I didn't see that people was just fussing at them about not staying in line or putting their hands on another kid. I don't say that in a braggadocious way because it really saddens because it's like I'm one of two black males here and the other guy is a PE teacher. I'm really the only one that teaches an academic subject. It's kind of like they don't get to see any other male leadership around here. (Browne, 2012, lines 504-514)

Some of them in middle school; I've got to chew them out because they disrespect their female teachers. The same things that I would tell them, they snap to it, but when one of them tells them, they roll their eyes, they smack their teeth. Some of them even walk out of the class from you. That's for real. I tell them straight up, "I wish you would do that to me." (laughter) It's like they don't respect them. For one, you can't go around disrespecting our black women. You can't grow up to be a man that does that. Number two, this is an authority figure. Whatever they tell you do, if you know that it's right, then you ought to be doing it. (lines 536-543)

The trick of otherfathering is to be supportive of your students while providing guidance for them. It is being a support for your colleagues without stepping on their toes. It is being a walking counternarrative without becoming the token disciplinarian in the building. It is being a father to the fatherless, oftentimes, without being asked. Not only do the gentlemen in this study embrace the work of being an otherfather to their students,

but they also teach because of this opportunity. Otherfathering is one of their purposes for teaching.

Teaching As A Calling

It's calm yet wild the style that I speak
Just filled with facts and you will never get weak in the heart
In fact you'll start to illuminate knowledge to others in a song
Let me demonstrate the force of knowledge
knowledge reigned supreme
The ignorant is ripped to smithereens
What do you mean when you say I'm rebellious
'Cause I don't accept everything that you're telling us
What are you selling us the creator dwellin' us
I sit in your unknown class while you're failing' us
I failed your class 'cause I ain't with your reasoning
You're tryin' make me you by seasoning
Up my mind with see Jane run, see John walk in a hardcore New York?
Come on now. It's like chocolate cow
Does it exist no way? No way, no how
It seems to me that in a school that's ebony
African history should be pumped up steadily, but it's not
and this has got to stop, See Spot run, run get Spot
Insulting to a Black mentality, a Black way of life
Or a jet Black family, so I include with one concern, that
You must learn. (Parker, 1989)

In “You Must Learn”, KRS-One (also known as “The Teacha”) explains why he feels compelled to teach about African and African-American history and culture: his people have been brainwashed into believing that they need to fit inside the box designed by colonial American standards of education. KRS-One is a critical pedagogue. Likewise, the gentlemen, the critical pedagogues, in this study teach because they feel compelled to do so. Whether they feel compelled because they were called by their God to become teachers; whether they feel compelled because those who know and love them

saw something special within and encouraged them to teach; or whether these men recognized the dearth of walking counternarratives and felt obligated to fill the void, they have all been called. They teach as a calling because doing so affects them deep within their spirits.

During the process of collecting data, I realized that being “called” was a major factor in the gentlemen’s decisions to become teachers. For some of them, they felt a pulling, or a calling, on their spirit to teach by God. For others, they felt this same pulling, or calling, but by someone in their lives: a mother, father, coach, or teacher. Hence, I found it necessary to identify “Teaching as a calling” as another purpose that the gentlemen in this study have for teaching. In my early conceptualizations of this section, there were two sections: teaching as a calling, and teaching as a spiritual experience. However, as I continued to write and digest my data, I realized that the two were more similar than I had originally thought – so similar, in fact that I decided to combine them. However, I will discuss these two concepts separately in this section of my findings as two subsections in order to give each concept its just due.

Feeling The Call To Teach

Many of the gentlemen in this study had become involved in some kind of volunteer or community service at one point in their lives before becoming teachers. Oftentimes, they had been asked by a friend to help out with an afterschool program at a school or at a church. It was during these experiences that they discovered that they could relate to young children. Cole Boyd explains that he “always liked teaching”, that he’d always had “a very natural relationship and connection with youth”, and that he

spent much time “working with a lot of youth groups” (Boyd, 2012, lines 3-5) that were connected to his church. Mr. Lattimer talks about his being called to teach while he was working as an underwriter. His experience in this profession and outside support gave him the impetus to pursue a career in education.

I worked there for a year. I could not see myself doing that same thing over and over again. One of my friends worked at this place called Teen Emphasis, and when I was [in college], I used to do some volunteer work for him during the summer time, and it also counted toward some things I was doing in summer school- as far as some credit goes. I worked with the middle school kids at different camps, and I could relate to them. Once again, if they were getting into stuff, I knew about it. I understood where they were coming from and I could relate to them.

It was an older lady that was there. She was a retired teacher, and she talked me into coming back during the fall and doing some more volunteer work and being a Big Brother. I was a Big Brother for a couple of years to one of the kids there and had an opportunity to find out the kind of things he was going through and help guide him in a way to get him away from some of the same stuff that I was dealing with at the same time, at the same age, when I was a 12-13 years old. I think that swayed me a little bit, but once again, I was working at a place I did not want to be, and at the time, my wife was like, “You need to do something to make you happy.” I said “I think I want to teach,” and she was like “Okay, go ahead and do it. I’m behind you.” (Lattimer, 2012, lines 58-75)

Mr. Lattimer was extremely unhappy with his previous career choice, and when he felt the call to work with children, he checked in with his wife. In my study of my Black men k12 teachers (Tafari, 2013), the support of a Black woman arose as one of the central reasons the Black men in that study became teachers. Though that this is not one of the predominant purposes for teaching in this study, I do see more than one reference to some kind of support from a woman – be it a mother, female teacher, or wife. For instance, Mr. Robinson’s mother helped him to identify a college that offered his desired major,

and several of the gentlemen speak highly of woman teachers who provided them with guidance and support. Some of these are addressed, in detail, in this section.

For Mr. Bowman, the calling to teach elementary school-aged children is a very unique calling because it requires a broader set of skills and the willingness to be accountable for other people's children. He explains that

I also think the amount of content knowledge that is necessary for elementary teachers across the board changes the work load. I haven't taught middle level, but it seems to me that in elementary, you have to balance a myriad of learning styles and paces that has to be balanced over 5 different subjects. Whereas in middle and high, you have at least scaled it down to content by subject, and kids are recommended to be in classes that should fit their pace. Also, in elementary school, you have to tread the fine line of encouragement and accountability. (FBFG, 2012, p.12)

This "fine line of encouragement and accountability" sets elementary school teachers apart from teachers at other levels. The men in this study see elementary school teaching as special because the age of the student calls for a more hands-on and holistic approach, just as the format of the elementary school requires a more expansive understanding of academic content.

Several of the gentlemen in the study describe their path to becoming elementary school teachers. For many of them, the decision came to them in a very free-flowing manner: in a manner that they did not intentionally choose elementary education as their majors of choice. In fact, Mr. Boyd shares that "after going through a couple of changes in my major, I settled with elementary education" (Boyd, 2012, lines 7-8). Though he describes a calling to teach that is rooted in his inclination to work with young people and the urgings of his father who frequently told him that he would be "a good teacher" (line

28), Mr. Boyd admits that becoming an elementary school teacher was his second choice for a career and that he “settled” on a major in elementary education after he was not accepted into the engineering program. Nonetheless, Mr. Boyd asserts that “teaching and education is a lifestyle” (Boyd, 2012, line 125) and that “it’s definitely a profession that you have to definitely want and be called to do” (lines 128-129). I found this particular thread of knowledge very interesting and, honestly, somewhat surprising. Mr. Robinson explains that

a lot of men don’t get into school education by starting off saying “I’m gonna be a teacher.” We all started off trying to do something else. And then we just fell into teaching because it was something that we could do, and I’m a victim of that myself. (Robinson, 2012, lines 407-409)

Mr. Robinson turned to teaching as an option because he needed work while he was pursuing a music internship in New York. Of course, Mr. Robinson does not speak for all Black men all over the world; however, his generalization is duly noted as six of the nine men in this study were not elementary education majors when they entered college: only Rob Porter, Caleb Mitchell, and Morris Bowman began their undergraduate careers majoring elementary education. Minister Browne, who began teaching as a second career, can relate to Mr. Robinson’s statement as his desire as a young child to help others was centered on becoming a doctor. He reflects:

I can remember as far back as when I was 10 years old; I wanted to be a pediatrician because I wanted to care for kids. It may seem funny, but I remember watching one of those infomercials on TV. When we were growing up, Ethiopia was a big thing with the starving children and things over there. I remember watching one of those, and I was like “Man, I want to be able to help kids.” (Browne, 2012, lines 10-14)

Mr. Lattimer also felt a pull to teach younger children. Also, a career changer, he explains this very free-flowing way of how he decided on elementary education.

[W]hen I went back to school, everything I did, all of my research, all of my observations, student teaching, everything was done at the elementary school level. It was never geared toward middle school or high school. I don't know why. I didn't have a desire either way. I knew I needed to get in there and...I thought, teaching was the thing I enjoyed. Middle school wasn't one of the schools that I went to observe, or high school.

When I first went to elementary school, it was different; whereas you go in the building, everybody immediately looked at you: adults, kids. And I liked that at first. Plus, I felt like the observations that I had at the elementary school was where I needed to be and where I could affect most of the younger kids. They have an opportunity to do something or go a different way, whereas in middle school, same thing. I think they have an opportunity to...it's not too late for them. High school, I don't think it's too late, but it's getting you to the point, you're set in your ways. Elementary school is just one of the things where you can help mold those kids a little bit more. (Lattimer, 2012, lines 79-92)

Though his decision to focus on elementary was free-flowing, Mr. Lattimer takes careful consideration of the concept that by teaching in the elementary school, one would have more enhanced opportunities to “mold” the children at a point when they could be “affected” before they became set in their ways. Mr. Robinson assents to this ideology and shares his thoughts on Black men considering a career in elementary education.

[M]y thing would be to do it for the purpose of [helping] a kid at an earlier age. I think we [Black men elementary school teachers] have all tried doing it at the high school route. Though it does help a lot of kids at the last gate..., but what if more of us hit them early on with the mindset and got it right for them to work with the years of going through school instead of them having to figure out who they are or what they are about before they meet you before they go into school? By that point, we have lost the war or many of the battles. (Robinson, 2012, lines 392-396)

Mr. Robinson focuses on the importance of Black men following their calling to teach but adds his insight on why elementary, as opposed to secondary, needs to be a viable option for more Black men so that they can aid in the gender and identity development of their students. Mr. Lattimer allowed his spirit to be moved in the direction of an elementary school teacher as a result of his student teaching experiences. Likewise, Mr. Lucas admits that when he had decided to go back to school to become a teacher, he was clear that he wanted to become a middle school math teacher. However, a combination of graduation requirements and his student teaching experience changed his mind. He reports

[I]n order to do [teach middle school math], I had to take 18 hours of math and 18 hours of another subject, and I would've had to be in school for an additional two years to meet those requirements because I didn't have them already. He said if I did elementary ed, that I could get...I could go through the same course I was on and graduate on time and then just take the Praxis for middle and the Praxis for high school, and I would be able to go that way. So I was like, "Well cool. That's my plan." I mean, my mom's a middle school principal, so I was gonna be guaranteed a spot. Not necessarily at her school, but at least in the county. So that was my plan, but when I got into the program, I fell in love with the little kids. Like the reason I didn't want to is because they're little and they cry and they whine and all that stuff. I wanted someone I could talk to and like "Sit down. Do what you're supposed to do," and they understand. But as long I don't go lower than 3rd grade, I'm fine. Like 3rd grade was the lowest I went, and they didn't have as much crying, they were able to hold themselves together. I did 4th grade for my student teaching, and I loved it. (Lucas, 2012, lines 45-56)

Though he had been called to teach, the decision to join the band of Black men teaching elementary-aged children evolved in a more round-a-bout way. Through student teaching, Mr. Lucas was able to truly experience what elementary-aged children are like. He was able to learn that they didn't "cry and whine all the time."

Though he originally followed the calling to teach younger children, Mr. Bowman did not always enjoy school himself. In fact, the road he travelled to the classroom was one full of twists, turns, and disappointments. JROTC helped to change his mind and get him on track. He shares that

school was just something to do because it was something I had to do. I never really understood the main purpose of it. I guess when I really got into high school, where I actually had the opportunity to teach, was in JROTC. In JROTC, I had an opportunity to be a leader. And in there, I became a part of a drill team and the Color Guard, and I moved up in rank so quickly, and I became...the second lieutenant colonel at that school – the first sergeant major, which was like the most popular position because our C.O was a sergeant major, so *that kind of gave me the want to teach.*

When I had that opportunity to hear “Well kids just love to see you do stuff.” You know, at that time, it was performing for me, but the other people were like, “Well, kids just gravitate to you. They listen to you so well.” The real turning point was I have a younger brother, and I’ve been working with my younger brother since I’ve been able to drive a car because we didn’t stay in the same household, so I would pick him up and just teach him everything I could, and I knew to try to help him have a better life because I knew that we were born into a struggle.

Well, like I said, in JROTC, I got the opportunity in my senior year to go mentor some fourth graders at an elementary school, and I remember the principal coming to me one day after school because I had just got me a little truck. I was so excited; I worked so hard for it. And the principal told me that I couldn’t go do it because – he said my music in my truck was too loud, and I was extremely offended because I was poor. I had a little truck, and I had little, small speakers, and there was other guys with booming sound systems, and I knew for a fact that it wasn’t me.

But I got suspended, and they told me that I was not a good enough role model for these kids. And I’m thinking, “I’ve never been suspended in my entire life,” so for this to happen – I mean I don’t even have a track record - I’m thinking, “If you would just look at my track record as a student, you would see that this doesn’t line up. I don’t even get a slap on the wrist or anything. You just wanna go suspend me, kick me out of school because you think I’m such a hazard.” That made me wanna say, “Look, there’s no way in the world that you’re gonna tell me

that I can't be useful to these kids." And that was kinda the turning point for me. (Bowman, 2012, lines 26-51)

In this excerpt from his one-on-one interview, Mr. Bowman describes the important series of events that directed him towards a career as a teacher. He went from being an uninterested student to a leader in JROTC to an otherfathering big brother to an elementary school teacher and found different points of motivation along the way. The calling for Mr. Bowman was so strong that he continued to strive despite the suspension setback. In fact, he started college as an elementary education major because a lot of the people in his life had been telling him that he was "good with children" and that he would make a good teacher. He did not even know about Call Me Mister until he met the young men who were in the program and were also staying in his dormitory. In regard to becoming an elementary school teacher, he shares that "it was destined" because of the "Merchants of Hope" that he has had in his life. The term "Merchants of Hope" was coined by Dr. Crystal Arlene Kuykendall in 1992.

What I mean by that is throughout my life, there's been people, and when I say people, I mean like I can remember being in the 5th grade, and I had a teacher that said, "If you go pick pecans off this tree for me, I will pay for your [field] trip to [a major amusement park], and I will provide you with some money to go." Uhm...and I remember being in the 6th grade, and I had a teacher – I mean not a teacher, but I met a guy that did some landscaping. I went to his yard. I had seen another guy working there, and I said, "Hey, can I work here, too?" He called me two weeks later, and we're having a conversation, and he offered me a job to work there. But these little people that kind of were staggered throughout my life were teaching me intangible tools for life, and I never picked up on this. I didn't pick up on this initially, and I wouldn't say that it inspired me so much or had to do with the direct path – as something that was meant for me, that was destined for me as a person. And so...because of those people – I call them "Merchants of Hope" – because of those Merchants of Hope in my life, I was able to get to where I am today. And if we remove any of those individuals, my life could be

crazy. I could be the uhm...megamind behind some kind of drug or something because that's the path I could've easily been down had I not had these people in my life. (Bowman, 2012, lines 93-107)

Mr. Bowman's Merchants of Hope gave him the encouragement and support that he needed to be successful and guide him in the right direction. They made it possible for him to be open and ready to receive his calling when it came. Here, he expresses how his Merchants of Hope inspired him to teach.

I just want to be able to offer what those people have offered to me. I think that's really at this point in life – the reason I do what I do is because someone else did it for me. I think that if we just harness those great things that others have done for us and do it for other people, then I think that's really the way to change the world. And so....that's the inspiration that I get behind what I do. For me, it was later found. It's almost like you go through the experience, and then you find after you've been through it versus, you know, you just knew. I'm not one of those people who just knew that their parents were generations of teachers, or you know, they just knew from kindergarten that they always wanted to be a teacher, and they played school. Mine was like God put me in these places to grow and to learn and to shape my life and because of that, I'm giving back – only what's been given to me. (Bowman, 2012, lines 117-126)

I think my life experiences are probably the most indirect and unique qualifier for me to do what I do. (lines 181-182)

For Mr. Bowman, teaching touches him at the center of his spirit. Teaching is a divine, almost spiritual, experience for Mr. Bowman. He gives the credit to God for placing him in the situations that would shape his life in such a way that he would choose this career.

Hearing The Call To Teach

Some of the gentlemen in this study discuss teaching as a spiritual experience, in both religious and non-religious standpoints. Mr. Porter speaks of his decision to become a teacher from both perspectives. He was targeted and recruited into his high school's

Teacher Cadet program by his English teacher (a woman); however, he defers his teacher's recruitment and his subsequent acceptance into the program as God's plan for him: a call that he just answered.

I will never forget this – I was in 11th grade. This English 4 teacher, she came to me. She's like "Rob, you're a dominant role model in school" because I was very involved in sports. I was involved in different clubs. I was into school and stuff like that. Even though I got picked on my first two years, I was still, you know, a figure in the community – an important figure in the community. She's like "Well Rob, a lot of kids look up to you, a lot of your peers look up to you. I think that teaching would be a good avenue for you." She introduced me to Teacher Cadet, and there was only – by the time everything was said and done, there was only 9 of us in that class, and I was the only African-American male. There were two of us males all together.... But she came to me; she was like "Well Rob, we're starting the Teacher Cadet class, and I would love it if you were in that class. You're a role model in the community, and it'll be very fitting if you would join the program." So me, I said, (laughs) I had pretty much finished my course workload my junior year, so my senior year, I was pretty much taking electives. So I thought, "Why not?" (Porter, 2012, lines 53-66)

I felt that it was God pushing me towards education even more because ... applying for the Teacher Cadet,...there's an application process and everything like that, and I turned my application in on the last day. I mean it was completed and everything, but it wasn't in tip-top condition. I turned it in on the last day, not anticipating on going past the first level, and lo and behold, I made it all the way through to the program. So I was like "Oh. Okay, well I guess...this is a sign from above." But I mean before then, there was really nothing that really inspired me to go into education. (lines 99-105)

After successfully completing the Teacher Cadet program in high school, Mr. Porter continued on the education track as he entered college; however, he had not decided what grades he wanted to teach.

I was like, "Okay, I don't really know what I wanna do." And then, I started praying about it, and then the scripture came to me: "Raise up a child in the way they should go" [Proverbs 22:6]. So I was like, "Okay, well I'll just do this." I mean, it was random. "What should I do? I don't know." Well, I'll pick this.

Okay. And then God, he had spoken and confirmed my choice and everything, so I was like, “Alright.” So that kinda sorta...I kinda just jumped in, not knowing exactly where I wanted to go, and then God came back and confirmed it and said, “Yeah, this is where we need to be.” (Porter, 2012, lines 114-119)

The confirmation of his decision by God gave Mr. Porter all of the validation he needed.

Mr. Porter speaks at length about his relationship with God in regard to teaching.

When I was younger, my mother got me involved in Pop Warner Football, and the football coach –African-American man- he helped push me. He helped push me to the point where I got saved when I was moving from 3rd to 4th grade and stuff like that, so he got me on the track spiritually, and like from that point, God just ordered all my steps from that point for me. I can really say that from that point of being saved, up until this point in my life, it really wasn’t any work for me. It was just me going out and doing stuff, and God shining forth, showing His way, showing His thing, you know what I’m saying? Showing me where he needed me at, you know what I’m saying? So it’s like...it’s more so, ”Okay God, I’m your servant. Do whatever. I want to live a rough life in the beginning, so I can relax in the end part of my life.” And from there he just, “Okay. Go here. Do that. Do that. Do that. Oh yeah, join this.” Honestly, I can say that I really didn’t put much thought into the choices that I made, but the choices that I made ended up allowing me to arrive here. (Porter, 2012, lines 138-147)

Mr. Porter praises God for shining through him and ordering his steps. He takes no credit for the work he has done to become a teacher because he concedes that it was all in God’s plan for him. Furthermore, he shares that once he graduated from college, he continued to hear God call him to teach. He explains that he “really started seeking God about it, and He said to me, or he spoke to me. He was like, ‘Inspire, encourage, and motivate the young men to become better – to become more than what they are’” (lines 151-152).

Minister Browne concurs that God ordered his steps as well. When he talks about what he thought he would be doing as a career, he reflects on his childhood desire to be a pediatrician. He shares, “I thought that my working with kids would entail me being in

medicine still, but He wanted me to do it through education and through the church. I embrace it wholeheartedly” (Browne, 2012, lines 116-118). Moreover, Browne holds no remorse or regret over his current career choice and explains that “you just do whatever God has put in your heart to do. Do it the right way and nobody can deny you” (lines 95-96). By following what God has put in his heart, Minister Browne, like Mr. Porter and Mr. Bowman, is answering the call to teach. Even when he was faced with the decision to attend medical school, Minister Browne reports that he responded by listening to his heart. He tells the story of how he made this decision when he was at a crossroads:

I didn’t go to medical school right away, so I did the nursing thing because it was quicker to get in school.... It was cheaper too. Then, I was thinking about should I go back. The Lord kept saying “No, that’s not what I have for you.” Then I was like, “All I have to do is take the MCAT again and do my applications.” I was about to do it anyway, but God just kept saying, “No, no, no.” I didn’t do it. I ended up quitting my job ...because I literally hated it that much. I quit, and I ended up moving back home with my mother for a minute.

Then lo and behold, Rice Sanctuary was opening up a brand new Christian academy seven years ago. My mother worked ...with one of the parishioners here. She was like, “They’ve got a school over there; you need to apply.” My response was, “Man I’m not teaching anybody’s little rug rat kid, getting on my nerves all day long.” (laughter) I promise you that was the first thing that came out of my mouth, this from somebody that did Big Brothers Big Sisters. I did mentoring, but that was on the side. Like, “I’ll see you after school; I’ll help you with your homework; we can go on little outings and stuff like that.” I was like, “Being in a classroom with a whole bunch of these?” (laughter) I was like, “No.” (Laughter)

Then this voice, it was the Lord again, but it was also my conscience, “You’re a grown man slim, you need to get back up out your mother’s house.” I was like, “You know what? You’re right. I was not raised to be at home.” I sent over my resume- emailed it over. How about they called me the same day! I think I interviewed two days later and got the call the next day to be a teacher here. I’ve been here ever since. (Browne, 2012, 180-200)

Similar to Mr. Lucas, Minister Browne initially found the idea of working with small children frightening. However, they both still opened themselves to the experience. It is clear that Minister Browne teaches as a calling: a calling from God. In fact, Minister Browne has completely embraced this spiritual aspect of himself. He speaks of loving teaching at the Sanctuary because it allows him to teach about religion. There, he plays a dual role: Minister and Teacher. And he relishes the opportunity to provide, both, religious and academic leadership, guidance, and instruction for his students. Minister Browne explains how his 11th grade parochial school teacher encouraged him to follow his calling.

My 11th grade year, I had a white guy named Daniel O'Reilly. Probably the only... I won't say the only, but to this point, he is the only white man that I've ever loved and respected like he was one of my parents or something, like he was family. He instilled something in me that nobody else did. He was a no-nonsense person. This was when I was in 11th grade. He pretty much told all of us that we have a biblical responsibility to care for others, and he didn't care what we were aspiring to be, what we wanted to do with our lives. If we did not take time to give back and to make that a normal part of our lives, then we were pretty much useless human beings. (laughter) He used to say... because he was like, "God did not put you on this earth to be selfish. Since all of you are in a Catholic school that costs thousands of dollars to be in, you're obviously privileged to be here. You need to understand that your education comes with a higher price." (Browne, 2012, lines 341-353)

The inspiration and fervent guidance that Mr. O'Reilly gave to a young Jovan Browne has stayed with him and continues to impact him.

Some teach because they feel it in their spirits. Some teach because they are inspired to do so by someone of influence in their lives. Some teach because they heard God's call and allowed Him to order their steps. Regardless, of the source of the call,

they teach because they have been called. They heard or felt the calling and acted on it. Furthermore, they recognize that just answering the call is not enough. As Mr. Mitchell emphatically states, in order for Black men to help turn education around, they must “stay true” to their calling (FBFG, 2012, p.10). That involves remaining committed to teaching, especially on the elementary level.

Teaching As An Act Of Passion

When I'm alone in my room, sometimes I stare at the wall
and in the back of my mind I hear my conscience call
Telling me I need a girl who's as sweet as a dove
for the first time in my life, I see I need love
There I was giggling about the games
that I had played with many hearts, and I'm not saying no names
Then the thought occurred, tear drops made my eyes burn
as I said to myself look what you've done to her
I can feel it inside, I can't explain how it feels
all I know is that I'll never dish another raw deal
Playing make believe pretending that I'm true
holding in my laugh as I say that I love you
Saying amor kissing you on the ear
whispering I love you and I'll always be here
Although I often reminisce I can't believe that I found
a desire for true love floating around
Inside my soul because my soul is cold
one half of me deserves to be this way till I'm old
But the other half needs affection and joy
and the warmth that is created by a girl and a boy
I need love. (Smith, 1987)

“I Need Love” by LL Cool J (Ladies Love Cool James) was released in September of 1987 and is known as the first rap ballad. The song had a tremendous

impact on the young, growing Hip-Hop community because though rap was still very young, it had already begun to take on some hypermasculine qualities. However, when LL Cool J released “I Need Love”, the world came to a standstill. Here was this young Black, self-proclaimed, “ladies’ man”, a man who at the release of only his second album, releases this ballad to express the softer, more passionate side of himself. This song set the tone for young Black men of the Hip-Hop generation to follow suit by revealing the vulnerable sides of themselves, and this is why I selected a verse from this song to serve as the epigraph for this section of my findings. When I started to think about my findings, I found that revealing passion was a purpose of teaching for many of the gentlemen in this study. However, I was initially torn about what to name this purpose. My initial thought was “Teaching as an act of passion” because I had noticed the level of passion that was present when these gentlemen talked about teaching. However, as I began to write, and I thought about my role as a writer/researcher and as a Black feminist, I thought to rename the section “Teaching as an act of Transgression” in the vein of bell hooks’ *Teaching to Transgress*. I pondered this because passion in the classroom (and in Hip-Hop), particularly as it pertains to Black male bodies, is a taboo topic in an American society that fears the Black male body, especially when it exudes passion. And though, using “Transgression” in the subtitle would speak more highly to my perspective, I decided to stay with “Passion” because it is the term used by the gentlemen. And though I really need no reason more than that, I also thought that using the word “passion” in a study about Black men elementary school teachers might be

incendiary (because it is taboo), and that would be a good thing because my goal is to amplify the voices of these teachers anyway, right?

As I talked with the Black men teachers who participated in this study, I admired the level of passion that they shared with me. Perhaps I was particularly open to this purpose because I see the world through the eyes of a Hip-Hop feminist who thoroughly relates to feminist critical pedagogy's "insistence of *not* engaging the mind/body split" (hooks, 1994, p. 193). However, many of them spoke at some point during their one-on-one interviews or during the FBFG about "passion" as it relates to them as teachers and as it relates to their reasons for teaching. I found this to be particularly intriguing because the construction of masculinity in America has disserved men to such an extent that it is, typically, not safe to be a Black man who cares – especially if one considers himself "Hip-Hop." As I write this, I am thinking about my president, America's first Black president, President Barack Obama. Truly embraced by the Hip-Hop generation, he has made himself vulnerable on many occasions. A perfect example of this is the recent shock regarding President Obama's public displays of care and concern, and even tears, in the wake of his re-election in 2011, the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy, and the Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings. I would be remiss if I do not address the fact that I began and completed this research during the tenure of this historic presidency. This president openly displays passion for his wife and two daughters as well as for the people of the United States – especially those who are experiencing extreme pain and/or misfortune. President Barack Obama can be seen wiping away tears on the day after he was re-elected as president as he thanks campaign workers in Chicago. He can be seen

compassionately embracing Superstorm Sandy victims in New Jersey, and he can be seen wiping away tears as he sorrowfully addresses the American public regarding the shootings of 26 children and adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. In an America that does not make it easy for Black men to display passion without vilification, President Obama has proved himself to be a leader who transgresses – as are the men in this study. They may not be leaders of the free world, but they are leaders in their classrooms, and they lead with compassion and love. In this section, I share the portions of these men’s stories that illustrate why and how they teach as an act of passion.

Eros is something which is expected to be absent from the classroom. It is common knowledge that men teachers are expected to keep a certain distance from students and not engage in hugging or touching for fear of being accused of child molestation or child sexual abuse. hooks talks about the level of embodiment that was expected when female professors taught womens’ studies classes:

it was expected that we would bring a quality of care and even “love” to our students. Eros was present in our classrooms, as a motivating force. As critical pedagogues we were teaching students ways to think differently about gender, understanding fully that this knowledge would also lead them to live differently. (hooks, 1994, p. 194)

This same-sex eros is like the cultural connection between Black men teachers and Black male students. This type of education is liberatory because it changes lives.

Given that critical pedagogy seeks to transform consciousness, to provide students with ways of knowing that enable them to know themselves and live in the world

more fully, to some extent it must rely on the presence of the erotic in the classroom to aid the learning process. (p. 194)

hooks adds that “[w]ell-learned distinctions between public and private make us believe that love has no place in the classroom” (p. 198). However, the gentlemen in this study have unlearned this distinction. They believe that passion and love are necessary emotions to have as fuel for the purpose for teaching. In fact, many of the gentlemen were first introduced to the concept of teaching elementary school-aged children through some kind of community service or volunteer work. Shawn Wise was inspired to pursue teaching as a career after completing community service experiences while in high school and, again, while in college. About the children at the afterschool program where he volunteered, he says, “I guess they were close to my experience” (Wise, 2012, lines 43-44). This ability to relate to the young people is what ignited his passion. Minister Browne also volunteered as a Big Brother and mentor. He explains the relationship between being a mentor and being a novice classroom teacher:

lo and behold my mentoring background and tutoring background kicked in, and I was a natural for it. From day one, when I hit the ground running, I’ve been in charge of my classroom educating kids, pushing kids ever since. (Browne, 2012, lines 201-203)

Mr. Victor Lucas explains this connection even further:

While I was out of school, I spent a lot of time tutoring and volunteering in my mom’s classroom. This built a strong passion to work with children; it also brought to my attention that a lot of young men don’t have positive role models to choose from. I decided that I would become one. *I knew right off this was the right thing for me....* (Lucas, 2012a)

The immediate feeling of knowing is an example of a light coming on for Mr. Lucas. His experience as a tutor and volunteer gave him the opportunity to feel what it was like to work with children. He felt passionate about his desire to work with young children. He admits that, originally, he had plans of becoming a middle or high school teacher; however, the course load required to do so would have taken him an additional year to graduate. Therefore, he agreed to join the elementary education program. He smiles when he speaks of his entry into the education program:

But when I got into the program, *I fell in love with the little kids*.... I did 4th grade for my student teaching, and I loved it. Every day of it was great – even the bad days I will miss, you know? And those kids...it's different there than here, but up [at my last school], those kids, it was a lot of love. Like they see me in the morning, their faces light up, come give me a hug and made me feel good. I'd hug them back, and we have a good day. Now, here the kids are a little different – the culture's different. I can't hug the kids just because it would be taken the wrong way. (Lucas, 2012, lines 51-59)

For Mr. Lucas, eros is present, and his body and soul are parts of his overall teaching experience. He says that he “fell in love” with the students. He speaks openly of how much he “loved” student teaching, how much he “loved” the kids, and of how much “love” filled the school. His face glows as he talks about his experience working with his fourth graders. However, Mr. Lucas experienced a shift in culture from his student teaching experience in City A to his first professional assignment in City B.

Unfortunately, in his position at the time of this study (in City B), he explains that it is unacceptable for him to express any kind of physical emotion toward his students:

“Where I teach, I am reminded every day that I can't show any affection to the female students because it *can and will* be seen as something more” (FBFG, 2012, p.13). This

is quite a sore point for Mr. Lucas. I was also very touched and saddened when he mentioned that he was surprised that he was not allowed to touch his students. In Mr. Lucas burgeoning career, he has already encountered very contradictory experiences. He shares that in his first experience, in City A,

the parents encouraged [hugs and affection], you know? They were happy to know that their kids came to a teacher that gave them love and was able to give them a hug and everything and calm them down. Here (in City B), the most I can give is a fist-bump or a high five. (Lucas, 2012, lines 66-68)

Once able to give his students the love and affection that might help to “calm them down”, Mr. Lucas now finds himself teaching in quite unfamiliar territory. Mr. Lucas had been plainly, and repeatedly, told (by his mother who is a principal, the principal of the school where he teaches, the superintendent of schools, and his grade chair) that because he is a Black man, he must refrain from showing the children any form of affection; only a high-five or fist bump would be allowed. He was taken aback that his passion for his students could be “misconstrued” as sexual misconduct; thus, much to his dismay, he refrains from showing his students the passion that he feels for them. When asked if he thinks he could get used to not being able to touch his students, he responds:

The whole not touching the kids? I think yeah. I don't have a choice really. I've gotten used to it now in these three and a half weeks I've been here.... I can get used to it. It's not something I like, but I can deal with it. I don't like paying taxes either, but I have to deal with that. (Lucas, 2012, lines 417-419)

I find it particularly interesting that Victor Lucas equates not being able to show his passion to paying taxes and acknowledges that an existence with limited affection is a

reality that he just has to “deal with.” Benjamin Robinson sees the demonstration of love and passion in his classroom as an investment in his students. He explains, “when you teach, you’re investing in a kid’s life not just the book lessons we teach them” (FBFG, 2012, p.15). This investment is an act of eros. Mr. Porter also expresses his level of investment:

I, too, am one of the first to come and last to leave, I spend my weekends going to support my students in their extra curricula activities, call parents to let them know how their students are doing positive and negative, I do all sorts of activities for the school. (FBFG, 2012, p.16)

This kind of behind-the-scenes, non-instructional support is a demonstration of Mr. Porter’s passion for his students and for his job as a whole. Like, Mr. Porter, Mr. Bowman’s passion transcends the walls of his classroom. He asserts,

here is an African-American male that is serious about the business of reviving communities. I’m not just a teacher; I’m a community leader. I’m trying to change parents, students, school, city, state. I’m trying to do it all. It takes a village to raise a child, so the goal is to build capacity so that everybody is a working part of making everything better. (Bowman, 2012, lines 150-154)

Bowman clarifies that he has many roles as a teacher because “teaching isn’t just being in the classroom” (line 358). When he speaks of teaching and education, he speaks of “impacting the lives of people who are impacting the future” (lines 365-366). Then, he asserts that

when you’re in front of a kid, you’re literally a molding piece. Your chipping away at that kid can mean life or death. So I take great honor in having the opportunity to teach kids that are not my own because I know that I’m [going to] go in there and treat them like my own. (lines 387-390)

Though Mr. Bowman has no biological children, his passion for teaching is such that he commits to teaching his students like they are his own children. And this is a task that he honors. This concept of taking “great honor” in impacting the future is an important one. Minister Browne also speaks of his passion for the future:

They are not only the future; they are today. The way that we teach them, mold them, commit to them, mentor them, raise them: that is such a vital and important responsibility. I take it on wholeheartedly. I think for me, as a kid, I always wanted to do something with the youth. (Browne, 2012, lines 6-9)

Working with youth has been a lifelong dream for Minister Browne. He teaches to change the present and the future. He is like his fellow participants, who are teaching because they are passionate about the students, about the families, and about the communities. They want to affect real change. These men teach to transgress. Consequently, they push the limits that say Black men don’t care or that Black men are emotionless. Because of the obstacles before Black men in education, they have to

be cut out for [teaching]. You’ve got to have a nurturing nature about you, have to have a nurturing spirit. You just can’t work with kids and not have that. I don’t know if all males have that: white or black. I really think I got mine from my father always being there for me and with us all the time. I did what I was always around and was used to. (Lattimer, 2012, lines 354-357)

Mr. Lattimer got his nurturing spirit from his father, and this sense of eros stayed with him and steered him into the elementary school classroom. It is this similar nurturing spirit that inevitably led Mr. Robinson to the pre-kindergarten classroom. He shares that he has “a lot of fun teaching them because they [pre-k children] make fun learning. They don’t have any prior anxieties about learning” (Robinson, 2012, line 127). This aspect of

“having fun” is a major part of Mr. Robinson’s experience because eros is present.

However, this eros goes beyond his classroom and spreads itself onto the different students with whom he comes into contact on a daily basis.

[S]ometimes you just got to grab up these kids boys or girls and hug ‘em ‘cause they don't get it anywhere else. So I guess well... I don't hug them all, but there are certain ones though you know you can hug and be okay with. But to replace the hug, I high-five everybody I see. I make it a point sometime to go across the cafeteria or across the classroom, or if I’m walking down the hallway, I see a kid, and they’re not looking too happy, then, I stop what I’m doing, and I make it a point to go all the way down the hallway to give them a high-five. I say, “Give me a high-five.” And believe it or not, those smiles that you put on their face brightens up a day and just lets them know that somebody was thinking about them for that moment or that time. So sometimes I feel like my role is some days just to put a smile on someone’s face. (Robinson, 2012, lines 213-219)

Mr. Robinson seeks to involve passion in his students by helping them to feel better on a daily basis. This is a constant demonstration of the passion that he has for teaching and the care he has for his students in his daily practice. However, he, like several of the other gentlemen in this study battle with the stigma attached to showing too much love for their students. Because of the stigma/the stereotypes, they are bound to “high-five” (Robinson) and “fist bump” (Lucas) students instead of give them the hugs that not only show their students that they love them but also fill the need for compassion that many children have.

Rob Porter’s mentor helped him to learn how to be a passionate man of color elementary school teacher. He explains,

I had the opportunity to work with a guy. It was his 8th year teaching. He was teacher of the year, and he was also a male. He retired from the Army. He was Native American, so he was a minority as well. And he just knew his stuff. He

just showed me how a guy would command the presence of the students and how a guy would interact with students in an elementary school setting.... I remember (laughs) he was really a mentor to me, especially being that his personality was very similar to mine. I like to take control of my class and make sure that I have the dominant role in my class. Even though I'm the facilitator, you know, my personality commands respect. So I got to make sure I have the respect piece in my class while at the same time still letting the students, you know guide themselves through the learning process. But like I said, that was a thrill working with him because that, like I said... that showed me how to be a man, a minority male in the elementary classroom. And the fact that he worked with 2nd grade, that showed me how I can, you know, command control and at the same time still be loving and then caring and gentle with the children as well. So I really, really enjoyed that. (Porter, 2012, lines 34-46)

Before this internship experience, Mr. Porter did not realize that a man could “command control”, “be loving”, “caring”, and “gentle” all at the same time. He did not know because he had not seen it in practice. For Porter to see a caring man in action was an invaluable part of his growth and development into an effective elementary school teacher – and a prime example of why we need more Black men elementary school teachers. He tells this story with a warm smile, as if it happened only yesterday. Porter further explains:

One of the biggest things for young African-American men is the fact that they are never shown the door of opportunity. It's always shut in front of them.... One particular boy, last year when I started tutoring in the 3rd grade as well as 4th grade: the 3rd grade teacher had nothing good to say about him – nothing good at all. I'm sitting here like, “What you mean you don't have nothing good to say about this kid? This boy is bright. You know?” And it's like. Looking at it from her perspective, she said that he's the worst of the worst. I got the same boy this year. He scored two level 3s on his EOGs the first time around. I'm like, he was never (laughs) -I mean from what I saw last year- he was never that, you know what I'm saying? But from her perspective, that's what he was. And that's how she treated him, to the point where he didn't succeed, but now, with the right opportunity, he succeeds. (Porter, 2012, lines 261-270)

Porter's passion for teaching is the "motivating force" behind his commitment to his students. His passion helps him to see his students, especially African-American boys, in a positive light. His passion fuels him to ensure that the "door of opportunity" is open for the young men with whom he comes in contact. Likewise, for Caleb Mitchell, teaching is also an act of passion. He asserts

it's definitely almost a travesty that more males of color aren't in the elementary realm because these kids need it. They need to see figures like myself and other brothers who are passionate about learning, passionate about education, and are going to be there to help them to be the best that they can be. I think that we can transcend this education thing if there were more brothers around. We can transcend the traditional landscape of education right now with strong, positive affirming brothers in the educational realm, especially elementary school because we are going to be those coaches. We are going to push those kids beyond the scope of what is expected in a normal curriculum. We are going to get them to build things, not just build bridges, but to move beyond the box. Because that's who we are, and so, I believe that we have so much passion and we can invigorate this education piece to a place that's never been seen before, but the education landscape is clouded by this reality that it's for..... according to research...typical white female...ages 25-40.... who is going to come in and save the day...I have nothing against women....I have nothing against white women...I do believe that we don't do enough to get brothers. (Mitchell, 2012, lines 174-189)

For Mr. Mitchell, passion is paramount in the teaching of children, and he is not afraid to verbalize this emotion. Not only is he not afraid to discuss passion as an emotion in the classroom, but he also states that it is a requirement. He states, "I think it's a very pure passion if you do remain an elementary school teacher" (Mitchell, 2012, lines 274-275).

Teaching As An Expression Of Hip-Hop

Broken glass everywhere
People pissin' on the stairs, you know they just don't care
I can't take the smell, can't take the noise
Got no money to move out, I guess I got no choice

Rats in the front room, roaches in the back
Junkies in the alley with a baseball bat
I tried to get away but I couldn't get far
'cuz a man with a tow truck repossessed my car

Don't push me 'cuz I'm close to the edge
I'm trying not to lose my head
Uh huh ha ha ha
It's like a jungle sometimes
It makes me wonder how I keep from goin' under (Chase, et.al, 1982)

The above is the opening verse in what is, in my humble opinion, perhaps one of the most quintessential Hip-Hop songs of all time. Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five released “The Message” at a time when Hip-Hop was a very young culture. This song changed the trajectory of Hip-Hop; thus, Hip-Hop began to develop the character that would have it be heralded as the “CNN of the ghetto” as eloquently stated by Public Enemy’s front man, rapper Chuck D years later. In “The Message”, group members Melly Mel and Duke Bootee chronicle the struggles of the Black poor living in New York City ghettos. “It's like a jungle sometimes it makes me wonder how I keep from goin' under” became the mantra of the Hip-Hop generation as it was a symbol of a survival mentality. The gentlemen in this study were all born as members of the Hip-Hop generation. The Hip-Hop generation “is a generation that birthed itself. In this view, the new black youth culture is a complete breakaway culture that is an outgrowth of the conditions of our time rather than a cultural continuum” (Kitwana, 2002, p. 134). The majority of the gentlemen in this study, as are many Hip-Hop generationers, are reminiscent of Hip-Hop’s “golden era” (late 1980s to mid 1990s). They recall the days when rap music told a particular type of story – when it relayed a message of struggle and

survival. Hence, many of them agree that contemporary Hip-Hop is littered with negative imagery that does not portray Black people in a positive light. Mr. Porter expresses his take on this topic:

I opposed Hip-Hop a lot because of the message that was behind the lyrics and the videos that were portrayed and the lifestyle that was portrayed with the African-American community. And the fact that BET and MTV and all these other public television stations kept on repeating the same thing over and over – even the radio stations repeating the same message over and over and over again. Basically, the message is not positive for our future. Not positive for African-American people and the image they show the kids is a negative image, you know? The Hip-Hop genre: the things that they're saying, not a lot of that music is positive, not a lot of it is inspirational. So, for a long time, I didn't like it for that very reason. "Ya'll not putting on a good message for us. Ya'll not giving our kids a positive image to follow out there. You giving them an image that being a drug dealer is good, fine and dandy. I mean, I've been doing some research. There was some good behind some of them, but at the same time, it was very far and between that I found that good Hip-Hop song that had a good, clean message. You know, and it's like I said, a lot of the stuff that I hear on the radio nowadays is like talking about sex, money, and murder. And I'm like "Gosh!" And our kids, the sing this stuff, come in the classroom: "You ratchet!" and stuff like that, and I'm like, "What is ratchet?" (laughs) (Porter, 2012, lines 339-356)

Though Mr. Porter does not like most contemporary mainstream rap music, he has not given up hope. He continues to look for songs that have that "good, clean" message that he craves. For instance, Mr. Porter, along with Mr. Mitchell, enjoys gospel rap as one way to stay connected to Hip-Hop culture. Mr. Porter enjoys gospel rap because it has "the same style that the students listen to sometimes but different lyrics" (Porter, 2012, lines 336-337). Overall, the men in this study love Hip-Hop in its various forms and appreciate the changes and growth that it has made over the years since its inception in 1973. In this section, I discuss how, for them, teaching is an expression of Hip-Hop. I

discuss how Hip-Hop culture has influenced their pedagogy and share their stories in relation to the facets of their Hip-Hop identities, or selves, that I introduced in Chapter 2.

Hip-Hop In My Classroom

People born between 1965 and 1984 have a unique set of characteristics that sets them apart from other generations and gives them a unique quality. As previously mentioned, in this study, I focus on Black men during this era and have included two gentlemen born just outside this era to join the conversation. However, though these men were both born within four years of the 1984 cut-off, their contributions are included and appreciated without any prejudice. Brandon Robinson feels that one the things that makes this generation of Black men teachers unique is that “we are old enough but yet young enough to understand hip hop and how we can use it to relate fully with the generation of kids that we teach” (FBFG, 2012, p.2). This ability to connect to his students is very important for Mr. Robinson. Minister Browne feels that men of this generation

are more conscious! We had more positive and politically laced rap back in the day. We were about movements, history, and civil rights.... We are fighters but not quick to pick up a gun or turn to drugs to solve our problems.... We are lovers of our women. Not prone to disrespect them or use them as objects of our desires. (FBFG, 2012, p.2)

They agree that this generation is vast and diverse. Caleb Mitchell states his opinion about the generation: “black men from the Hip Hop Generation (I would say 1965 to 1990) stood for something greater than themselves... community, love for their people, justice, freedom, stability” (FBFG, 2012, p.3). During the FBFG, the gentlemen

reminisced about the good ole' days of Hip-Hop. They spoke of the "positive message" that was ever present in the music because rappers rapped about "better lives, education, history, and consciousness"; they spoke of how the music was designed for them to "have fun" and how the lyrics made them "think about life"; they recalled that Hip-Hop was an "art form". On the contrary, they also feel that, overall, the industry today is "polluted", "pimped out", has little substance, and focuses, predominantly, on sex, drugs, and violence. The general consensus of the group is that the media is a major culprit in the negative downturn that Hip-Hop has taken. Minister Browne feels that one major difference between the Hip-Hop generation and the millennial generation is as follows:

we all used our music to bond, as opposed to today, where it seems like music is mostly divisive; the things that are being said in the music, the images that are being portrayed. We had things like Self-Destruction and KRS-One and Heavy D and Queen Latifah and people like that, that were giving positive images of what rap was. Public Enemy. Militancy, things like that. Nowadays everything is about sex, sex, sex, drugs, drugs, drugs, drinking, drinking, drinking, cars, cars, cars and clothes, clothes, clothes. (Browne, 2012, lines 44-50)

Minister Browne expresses a sincere concern that Hip-Hop is a serious problem that he believes is deleterious to today's young person. Morris Bowman doesn't quite consider the music to have a deleterious effect; however, he does share the feeling that the music has severely changed over the years. He describes his close connection with Hip-Hop:

When I was younger, I used to write music. In fact, I did a song with one of the Call Me Mister graduates. We actually did some educational Hip-Hop for students, but...I think I was really into meaning, flow, and preciseness.... It's just something about using language in a creative way.... And one of the things I hate about Hip-Hop when I got into college is that people would just rap stuff that didn't make sense. You know, at least in older rap music, you can understand some people's struggle. You can understand what they were going through. You

can understand ...it can almost be uplifting, even though it could be derogatory, it still had some uplifting components to it. (Bowman, 2012, lines 288-300)

Hip-Hop changed as Mr. Bowman got older. However, Mr. Lucas asserts that the problem is much bigger than Hip-Hop alone: “Black culture, not just hip hop culture has always taught young black men that you have to be tough. Hip Hop culture sensationalizes it to the extreme” (FBFG, 2012, p.10). In agreement, Cole Boyd adamantly states,

I believe that Hip Hop does lead young men astray. Our youth see hip hop figures as role models. However, young men see these "role models" and see quick money, and fame. Rappers rarely have positive songs and lyrics. I think the solution has to be a collective effort between parents, schools, churches, and media. (FBFG, 2012, p.9)

Just as these gentlemen pinpoint the negative nuances of contemporary rap music, they also believe that with the proper guidance and support via a healthy collaborative effort among the various stakeholders, Hip-Hop can be utilized as a viable tool in the classroom to help students learn and develop into progressive adults. Dimitriadis (2009) asserts that, “media and popular culture play important roles in young people’s lives and must be explored as a kind of alternative ‘lived’ curriculum” (p. 8). By incorporating forms of this “alternative ‘lived’ curriculum” as part of their pedagogy, the gentlemen in this study authenticate learning and find ways to help their students make connections with the academic space. Growing up as part of the Hip-Hop generation, Marc Lamont Hill explains that because of Hip-Hop, he “became more critical of critical surroundings, eventually questioning the system that forced me to the Northeast just to get a quality

education” (Hill, 2009, p. xvii). Mr. Boyd explains what he likes about the rapper, Drake. He explains that Drake “wanted to be a rapper, and it just didn’t work out initially, so he kept working at it, so he finally achieved his dream” (Boyd, 2012, lines 107-108). He admires Drake’s story of persistence and feels that his students can learn from hearing stories like this. Mr. Robinson eloquently states, “we all relate to music because it speaks about life and hip hop, in general, speaks about life and the struggle” (Robinson, 2012, line 332).

Hip-Hop is such a part of who these men are that they often speak about how they infuse Hip-Hop culture into their daily practice as a tool of engagement “without thinking about it” (FBFG, 2012, p.8). Minister Browne explains that he uses

slang, hip sayings, and figurative language to get points across in Science. The use of imagery to connect urban life, suburban life, and education is a great thing to do. It helps the students to express themselves in ways and terms that are beneficial to them. I think that we spend too much time trying to make our youth into what we want them to be and not what they want to be and what they are good at. (FBFG, 2012, p.8)

In other words, if Hip-Hop is the language that one’s students speak, then it makes sense to utilize Hip-Hop culture as a way to connect with these students. Similarly, Mr. Lucas explains that Hip-Hop is a way of being for him that is similar to his students and their families. He states,

Just the way I talk. I don’t talk like uhm...a White guy would. I talk like I always talk. I don’t switch that up. I talk to the kids the way they’re used to. The way their parents talk. I just don’t use any profanity.As far as anything else with Hip-Hop...other than that, the way I dress, my word problems that I give. It’s not “Sally bought some new drapes for her home.” It’s “Tamika wanted money for some new Jays” you know? Things like that, and the kids – it makes

them wanna work the problems out. I use their names. Some of the names you got down here – Shaquanna, Tomika. So I use their names in the problems, like “Tomika needed \$250 to get the new LeBron James Elites.” I used Tomika’s name because she likes those shoes. So the new ones are two-fifty. I was like, “Well she needs two-fifty. She has $\frac{3}{4}$ of the money. How much more money does she need?” They’re like, “Oh. I’ve seen those shoes. They do cost \$250. So if you got $\frac{3}{4}$ of it. You know *of* means multiply in a word problem.” They know “*of*” means multiply in a word problem, so I give them a calculator, and they work it out to figure out how much they had, subtract to see how much they need. It was a big success using stuff like that - just using the terminology that they’re used to. (Lucas, 2012, lines 295-308)

By talking in a certain way and incorporating concepts that his students associate with

Hip-Hop, Mr. Lucas helps his students access the curriculum and experience success.

Mr. Wise focuses on the authentic nature of Hip-Hop to engage his students. He

explains, “I use hip hop just to relate to students, if the lesson has even just a name

they've heard of.....they'd be ten times more interested in the material presented” (FBFG,

2012, p.9). Minister Browne utilizes the skills that his students already have to help them

connect to Hip-Hop in a positive way. He shares:

our kids here are big in orchestra and band, so I’m always known to start hitting a beat or beatboxing for them. I just start off, and I tell them to join in - whatever comes to mind for science, just join in to what I’m saying. It could rhyme or it could not rhyme, as long as we understand the concepts. We’ll sit here and make entire songs about global warming or something. We’ll laugh and giggle and stuff like that. The kids have fun with it. You get that rhythm. You get that beat. You get the rhyming. You also get the connection between the subject and something that we all love, and that’s hip hop or rap music. (Browne, 2012, lines 616-623)

Browne draws on his students’ talents as orchestra musicians to help them relate to rap.

By doing this, they not only enjoy humorous moments in the classroom, but they also

have fun learning science concepts. Mr. Mitchell sees the importance in using Hip-Hop

as a part of his instruction as well. He recalls a lesson in which he also integrated Hip-Hop in a science lesson on adaptation. In the lesson, which covered how organisms change over time to adapt to changes in the environment, Mr. Mitchell shares that he

saw this is a great opportunity to use Hip-Hop too because Hip-Hop is about evolution, transformation, being able to survive. Many of the messages are about that. So...I found some popular Hip-Hop tracks, that I know that they love, found the instrumentals, and we created lyrics based upon the concept that was going on in the lesson. So what we would do is, I started off with the first stanza, first lines of poetry – excuse me - of the songs, of the lyrics that based upon the lesson. Then, I gave them an opportunity to write the bridge. We worked collaboratively to take the content learning, write out a song, and then we performed it to some Hip-Hop music. So I used that as an opportunity for us to blend it, and what was remarkable was: not only did they understand the science concept, they started teaching the younger kids in the school.... And so I still use Hip Hop, and I use it to teach math concepts, sciences, literacy, character development pieces. I use it in all kinds of ways. It's remarkable the stuff that kids own and take away and it's definitely been a great impact on the community. (Mitchell, 2012, lines 204-221)

Mr. Mitchell does not just utilize Hip-Hop instrumentals to engage and connect with his students. He transcends the obvious to relate the overarching concept behind what Hip-Hop is (evolution and transformation) to his subject matter (the life cycle). Furthermore, Mr. Bowman also speaks on how he uses Hip-Hop to engage his students. He says,

I used Hip-Hop as both a tool to engage students but as a tool to help students understand that we need to expand our minds because I understand that music is something that we listen to repeatedly. Everything that you put in your system is gonna come out back in some other way, shape, or form. So I help them understand some positive Hip-Hop, and we talk about Hip-Hop that wasn't positive with them because they brought it to the classroom. And then, I also exposed them to different cultures of music because I didn't want my students to become single-minded in their music intellect. That's one of the things that I find in the African-American community; music is a big thing for us, but we gotta use it the correct way. (Bowman, 2012, lines 241-249)

Similarly, Cole Boyd (a Call Me Mister graduate like Mr. Bowman) says that he uses “hip-hop beats but not actual songs” because his students are so familiar with rap that he wants to broaden their perspectives by exposing them to various kinds of music. Mr. Lucas shares that uses Hip-Hop in his “poetry unit. Great way to keep the kids interested in poetry and show them how rhyming patterns work” (FBFG, 2012, p.9). Minister Browne explains a creative way that he utilizes rap in the classroom:

I use the Youtube Science Raps; I talk to them about how a rapper or singer might put together a song; I have students write poetry as it relates to our subject matter and content. Using the Scientific Method, observation, predicting, and hypothesizing are key elements and require much description and imagery. There is however a need to be clear and not just self-expressive. Other Scientists must know what you mean, so having a strong command over language is pinnacle. (FBFG, 2012, p.8)

Like Mr. Lucas, Minister Browne seeks to help his students develop their language and analytical skills with Hip-Hop. Mr. Robinson uses hip-hop with his Pre-Kindergarten students to provide opportunities for movement and with the older students at his school to discuss the concepts in selected songs. He explains,

I often ask them what they think songs mean to see if they really have a clue to what songs are talking about and then I ask questions that will tell me if they believe the song to be a good example for them or a bad example. Most seem to get that most of the songs intent are not for them LOL...I think using Hip-Hop and other genres of music in the classroom is a good tool to use if you do it right. Despite what most may think about it, kids today are getting more education sometimes from Hip Hop on life than I can ever teach them because they listen to it a lot when they are away from school.... Hip hop is definitely a tool of self-expression, so use it. They will only do it any way; why not use it to help them?? (FBFG, 2012, p.9)

Hip-Hop is prevalent: a major part of many of their students' lives, so these gentlemen see its importance and are taking heed. Moreover, Browne constantly communicates with his students to find out what they're listening to, and he keeps a close eye on their behavior, monitoring how what they listen to is affecting their behavior. Furthermore, he highlights Hip-Hop history with his students because he believes that because many of them are talented classical musicians, singers, and lyricists, they will have a powerful impact on the current state of Hip-Hop and vice versa.

Whether it's through hip hop, whether it's through R&B, jazz, classical, whatever the music, whatever the genre, whatever the neighborhood, whatever the space that they grew up in, if we're not equipping them to be prepared for this type of life, then we're doing them a disservice. (Browne, 2012, lines 736-739)

Browne believes in the power of Hip-Hop as a way of understanding the world. He believes in Hip-Hop as a way of changing the world. That is why he takes it so seriously. He feels that not arming students with the ability to navigate Hip-Hop and other cultures is "doing them a disservice." Moreover, Mr. Lattimer asserts that

I do think it's important not just for male teachers but all teachers to understand their kids, have some connection. If you don't know anything about the culture or have an idea about what kind of music or what kind of movies or what kind of TV shows they're looking at, then I don't see how you can relate to them. I know we have to know what's going on in our culture. (Lattimer, 2012, lines 362-366)

This cultural connection is crucial for all teachers, not just Black or male teachers. Mr. Lucas' connection with his students is so strong that it almost transcends the body and becomes somewhat telekinetic. He illustrates

When I'm doing the EOGs, the kids can't talk, but at the end—when everybody's sitting here - --I'm walking through the classroom, I'm rapping to a song in my head, and I'm bouncing to the beat, and the kids are just dying laughing without laughing out loud. So then the other kids, they're joining in. Everybody's bouncing to the same beat I'm bouncing to. They have no idea what song I'm singing, but they're all bouncing to my beat. (Lucas, 2012, lines 287-291)

The Hip-Hop connection that Lucas has with his students relaxes them during what is, generally, a very stressful time of the school year. Hip-Hop is at the core of the rapport that he has developed with his students, perhaps, because, by not trying to hide his love for Hip-Hop, Mr. Lucas is revealing his honest Hip-Hop self.

The Hip-Hop Selves Reveal Themselves

In Chapter Two, I discussed the five facets, or selves, of a multi-faceted Hip-Hop identity that I have discovered, thus far, in the research of prominent Hip-Hop scholars and in my own study. Throughout my data collection process, I have recognized all five selves as presented by the Black men teachers who participated in this study. These selves are the Consumer Self, the Erotic Self, the Authentic Self, the Representin' Self, and Socio-Political Self. I share them here in the order that I first introduced them in Chapter Two.

The consumer self revealed.

The *Consumer Self* is based on Jordanna Matlon's "consumer-based identity" (2010). It provides an explanation for Black men's relationship with money within the confines of Hip-Hop masculinity and capitalism. While talking with the gentlemen who participated in my study, the topic of money, in relation to the low pay earned in this profession and the stigma of a Black man earning such pay, was one of discussion. The

men recognized that because they had chosen to become a part of what is stereotypical known as a “woman’s profession”, they would not make a substantial income because of that. In fact, they all admitted that the “reward of teaching” was much more important than the financial compensation that they could earn if they working were in other fields. For example, Mr. Wise asserts

I left a job where I was making more money. So, you know, if [money] was my motivation, I would not be sitting here. I guess it’s like I just do me, so I’m not too concerned about perceptions or anything like that. I see that tide turning a lot more recently – More Black men, or young Black men in teaching in general. But...those who know me know that I am very secure in whatever it is that I’m doing. But I see more rewards in this profession more than most professions. (Wise, 2012, lines 119-125)

Mr. Wise admits that he, like Mr. Lattimer and Minister Browne, left a lucrative career in order to teach. And he has never turned back. Mr. Mitchell speaks of black men who he knows that choose not to accept the rewards and challenges of teaching.

Many of the brothers who I grew up with who are just like me – very ambitious, very dedicated, determined – moved into middle school, are lawyers, politicians, doctors, whatever. They don’t necessarily stay in that track (elementary school) because they’re not earning the kind of money they need to support their families. So sometimes they leave because of financial reasons. So sometimes, I think it’s a very pure passion if you do remain an elementary school teacher. (Mitchell, 2012, lines 270-275)

The Consumer self in some men from this generation sees itself as “cut off from capitalism” as a producer. For gentlemen like the ones in this study, it simply takes on another role. The role is not that of consumer; it is not to be accepted as being gendered feminine. On the one hand, they talk of supplementing their income via investments and

coaching opportunities at the middle and high schools in their districts. On the other hand, they also speak of teaching as something that they do because they love it and cherish the rewards that come along with doing this work.

The erotic self revealed.

Mr. Mitchell connects the satisfaction with the teacher's salary with having a "pure passion". This is evidence of the *Erotic Self* at play. The expressions of love and compassion that these gentlemen share with their students are in the true erotic fashion. Though they are mindful of how and when they express their love for their students because of the societal constraints placed on them, the lack of love for them in American society, and the constructs designed to create and perpetuate fear of the Black male body, they consistently assert that passion is, indeed, a part of themselves, and it is a part of their teaching. hooks concurs that Black men in America are bound by constraints that impact how they express their erotic positions.

Whether in an actual prison or not, practically every black male in the United States has been forced at some point in his life to hold back the self he wants to express, to repress and contain for fear of being attacked, slaughter, destroyed (hooks, 2004, p. xii)

The ability and level to which the Black men teachers in this study express or hold back their selves is to be duly noted. This is an on-going struggle. However, they do find ways to demonstrate their love. Just as a parent would, they often feel proud of their students' accomplishments. Minister Browne shares: "It was kind of like I walked around here feeling like a proud father because I've seen them matriculate, and I've had a big influence on where they are today" (Browne, 2012, lines 289-290). Through the

various forms of otherfathering and via the creative ways they show compassion (high fives and fist bumps), the passion component of the erotic self is activated when they teach. The component of the erotic self that interrogates sexuality is also at play in this study. As previously mentioned, seven of the nine men in the study self-identified (without being asked to do so) as “straight” or “not gay” at some point during their interviews. Mr. Lattimer discusses that he has definitely noticed that several of the men elementary teachers he has met are homosexual. However, Lattimer does not problematize this fact while Mr. Robinson takes a strong stance that is very much in line with the overarching Hip-Hop culture as this aspect of his erotic self denies the two homosexual teachers in his school building the label of being “men”.

The authentic self revealed.

I found the *Authentic Self* to be a prevalent topic of discussion in this study. Mr. Lucas explains that he realized that when it came to teaching young children, “if I was myself – I don’t come in and be fake – I just come in as myself that I would have a positive influence on the students” (Lucas, 2012, lines 175-176). In a similar manner, Minister Browne shares,

Hip Hop is our connection to taking these youth much further, but we cannot fall victim to it either. We all have stories. I share mine with my kids and my students because they need to know that the struggle may be with a different generation but not much has changed in the struggle. Hip Hop brought me pleasure. I saw the booty shaking, heard the cursing, saw the gun, saw the drugs, saw rappers slain, but I made it through the streets of DC and the parks of suburbia with much help. I cannot say that I was unscathed because I made bad choices and got caught up in circumstances by being in the wrong areas at the wrong time. The greatest thing that I can do is to be honest. These kids love you when they know that you are real with them. (FBFG, 2012, p.11)

Browne's recognition and respect for the idea that "kids love you when they know you are real with them" is evidence of the Authentic Self at work. Mr. Lattimer clarifies that Hip-Hop is "a big part of our culture" and that when he speaks of "Hip-Hop", he is speaking of much more than just music. He explains:

How I relate to some of the kids sometimes,...when they're talking to you about something or talking to their friends about something, they may not think you understand it, but you do. Some of the things that they see, maybe on TV or movies or places they're going or events that's going on in the community, I can relate to that. (Lattimer, 2012, lines 264-268)

By being open to relating to his students, Lattimer relaxes and allows his authentic self to be present and at work.

The representin' self revealed.

I also see the *Representin' Self* present in these findings. On various occasions, the gentlemen in this study "represented" for their students by carrying out actions "with knowledge and pride in the fact that they reflect various socially constructed communities of which they might be members" (Irizarry, 2009, p.494). This is evident when Mr. Lucas demonstrates an understanding for his student from New York. Mr. Lucas understood and even appreciated the young man's unsettling behavior because Lucas was also from New York; he understood it to be a "Brooklyn attitude". Mr. Lattimer also reveals his representin' self in his presence as a Big Brother and as a teacher. His experience being able to relate to the young boys because they were dealing with the "same stuff that I was dealing with at the same time, at the same age, when I was a 12-13 year old." (Lattimer, 2012, lines 70-71) is evidence of his representin' self at work. In both of these instances,

the gentlemen recognize the ties that they have to the “microgroups” to which they belong and immerse themselves in the mentoring and guidance of their students because of the fluid affiliations they share.

The socio-political self revealed.

The *Socio-Political Self* is also prevalent in this study. Through Hip-Hop, Mr. Bowman is able to view his own shortcomings with a critical lens and understand their purpose in helping him to have the types of experiences that would help him become a stronger man. One of Mr. Bowman’s favorite songs is “Dear Mama” by Tupac. He explains that this song is dear to him because it taught him how to pay it forward. He states,

Me and my mom don’t have the greatest relationship,... and I have many moms... beyond my biological mother, but a big thing is to be able to repay people for what they’ve done for you. You know, I just feel like it’s so hard to thank some people for what they’ve done for me. I wish that sometimes I could just give that gift to people because they’ve given some stuff to me. For them, it probably wasn’t much. To them, it was something normal – it wasn’t abnormal. *It’s like teaching.* You just give them something just because that’s the right thing to do. That’s what you do. But for me, it was like, you just gave me half of my world. You just gave me some encouragement; it ain’t no way I could pay money for this. You just gave me something that has transformed me as a person. I can’t even ...I can’t get beyond it. You know what I mean? So to be able to do that kind of stuff: He [Tupac] talked about uhm...”It feels good putting money in your mailbox” ...and you know...I’ve grown to appreciate my mom even more, you know? He talks about “Even though you were a dope fiend, mama. You always were a Black Queen mama.” You know? My mom was an avid drug user, and to this day, me and my brother can’t even figure out whether she’s on or off...and we always wanted to give our mother the best life. (Bowman, 2012, lines 316-332, emphasis mine)

Mr. Bowman illustrates the powerful impact of this rap song on his life, his pedagogy, and his worldview. Like Gibson (2009), Bowman acknowledges that many teachers have

low expectations for their Black male students and then offers an example of how the talents of Black male students often go untapped.

For example, you got a young man; he cracks jokes; he talks throughout the whole day. Okay, great, guess what? He has a skill. That skill is a verbal. It doesn't necessarily have to be cracking jokes, but he is verbal. He could be the next great speaker in the world. We don't know because we haven't harnessed it. We don't take the time because it's disrupting our normal flow of things. [But] the last time I checked, school wasn't about creating a comfort for the teachers; it's about the teachers creating comfort for the student. So we gotta step out our comfort zone and comfort other people. (Bowman, 2012, lines 440-446)

Bowman's recognition of the fact that many teachers do not look beyond the surface to tap Black boys' potential is a socio-political perspective. Additionally, Bowman's perspective on teaching as a way to "comfort" and cultivate young Black male potential is an example of his Socio-Political Self in action. This is how he teaches as an expression of Hip-Hop.

Summary

In this section, I have discussed the data that I collected via one-on-one interviews and a Facebook Focus group. I identified and discussed five of the purposes of teaching for the Black men elementary school teachers in this dissertation study. These purposes are teaching as an act of resistance; teaching as an act of otherfathering; teaching as a calling; teaching as an act of passion; and teaching as an expression of Hip-Hop.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, & CLOSING THOUGHTS

I am a Black woman and a Hip-Hop Feminist troubled by the crisis affecting Black boys in American K12 schools (low high school graduation rates, high referrals to special education and out-of-school suspension, and high drop-out rates) and concerned about the dearth of Black men teaching in America's elementary schools (less than 2%). Some may ask, what is a Black feminist doing studying men? The irony in that inquiry is exactly why it makes such good sense. In other words, a Black Feminist approach allowed me to work the contradictions that some may perceive of a Black woman studying Black men. Black Feminism is NOT a battle to take rights back from men. Instead, the Black Feminist project is a humanist project. It is a project that demonstrates concern for how power affects the body, regardless of *and* with regard to gender. Black Feminists are alarmed when treatment and mistreatment are based on gender. Furthermore, we are concerned about the intersection of factors like gender, race, class, sexuality, etc. and how the constellation of these factors is used as a basis of judgment and discrimination. Black Feminists are just as concerned about the mistreatment of Black boys in schools as they are with women's rights.

I began this dissertation study with the passion to learn more about Black men elementary school teachers from the Hip-Hop generation, a very unique population. These men are unique because of the intersection of the era in which they were born,

their race, their gender, and their chosen profession. In order to learn more about these men, I crafted the following three questions to guide my study:

1. What are the types of life experiences that shape Black men from the Hip-Hop generation into elementary school teachers?
2. What inspires Black men to teach elementary school children despite the societal stigmas?
3. How does Hip-Hop culture impact the identity development and pedagogy of Black men who become elementary school teachers?

In this chapter, I share the conclusions that I have drawn from the intermeshment of the literature and the data that I have collected and analyzed from the one-on-one interviews and the FBFG. This chapter is organized into seven sections; these sections address the responses to each of my three research questions, the pertinence of Hip-Hop as a viable form of critical pedagogy, a liberating perspective in relation to Hip-Hop identity, the implications that I have for future research, and finally, my closing thoughts.

Conclusions

Question 1: What Are The Types Of Life Experiences That Shape Black Men From The Hip-Hop Generation Into Elementary School Teachers?

I have confirmed Lynn's (2006) declaration that Black boys need to see walking counternarratives in the elementary school classroom. They need to see what is possible (Bridges, 2009; Kunjufu, 1985; Noguera, 2008). Black boys need to see that they are smart and important enough to not just graduate from high school, but that they are also

smart and important enough to graduate from college and compete within the professional academic world. Gibson writes about this need:

Statistics such as those from the Urban Institute show that African-American males are more likely than any other group to be suspended or expelled or drop out of school. At the high school level, for instance, 31% of Black male students graduate after four years. The drop-out rate for African-American males in some high school is over 50%.... What's even worse is that out of those that graduate from high school, few attend college, and a fraction of those complete it. Because of low teacher expectations, African-American males are not only less likely to graduate high school and then go on to college, but are also systematically excluded from college preparatory classes. (Gibson, 2009, p.18).

In concurrence with Gibson, my findings demonstrate that Black men from the Hip-Hop generation also need to have people in their lives who have high expectations and want to see them succeed. The men in this study had mentors in the form of teachers, coaches, neighborhood business owners, and upperclassmen who took the time from their daily lives to listen to and determine what their mentees' needs were, and then took the time to do something about it. For many of these men, this support came in the form of an otherfather named Hip-Hop.

Their lives were filled with teachers who cared enough about them to go above and beyond the call of duty, like when Morris Bowman's teacher gave him the opportunity to raise money to pay for class field trips. Gibson (2009) affirms the idea that effective, supportive teachers are important factors in Black boys' decision to become teachers themselves. He explains that "[h]aving been inspired by one's own teacher(s) is one of the most common reasons given for choosing to become a teacher" (p.8). The participants' lives were also filled with coaches who took a vested interest in

seeing them succeed - not just in the sport – but in life (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). These coaches helped these young men by providing religious and spiritual guidance (Rob Porter), took care of them by taking them out to dinner (Victor Lucas), and taught them how to find the confidence within and to believe in themselves (Karlton Lattimer). Their lives were filled with neighborhood business owners who took a chance on them when they had no skills or prior experience - only the drive and desire to work (Morris Bowman). Their lives were filled with knowledgeable upperclassmen who took the time from their studies to sit and talk to open-minded freshmen about “changing the face of America’s classrooms” (Morris Bowman; Cole Boyd) The gentlemen in this study had the experience of mentorship in their lives and experienced encouragement and praise. Several of them had people in their lives who picked them up and brushed off their shoulders and told them they could do it. In conclusion, these are the types of life experiences that shape Black men from the Hip-Hop generation into elementary school teachers.

Question 2: What Inspires Black Men To Teach Elementary School Children Despite The Societal Stigmas?

There were so many things that inspired these men to choose this career path. They were not swayed by the meager salaries or low social status. Neither were they swayed by the stigma that may come with being mislabeled as homosexual or as a pedophile. In fact, several of them (Wise, Porter, Mitchell) had devised crafty investment strategies to supplement their salaries and also expressed enough of a cool confidence and strong sense of self to diminish any concern about what others might imagine their

“social status” or sexual orientation to be. The gentlemen in this study teach elementary school in spite of the societal stigmas that plague our society. They teach despite the alienation they sometimes experience in what some deem a “women’s profession.” They teach because they want to disrupt negative images of men in the media and destroy stereotypes that men do not have the “maternal instincts” to be effective teachers. Like Nelson (2002), they believe that

[c]hildren need loving men in their lives to balance the distorted and negative image of men in the media. Children have few opportunities to see images of gentle, nurturing, competent men. What is the implication for children, women and men if we have so few men caring for our young children? What message do children receive from this obvious absence of men in schools? What value does society place on a career if there are so few men working in it? (Nelson, 2002, p.5)

They teach because they care about children and because they enjoy working with children. They teach because they want to help young Black boys be successful in a world that does not always love or understand them. Because “African-American male students...have limited experiences with African-American male teachers who may possess unique cultural and gendered perspectives that their female counterparts lack” (Bridges, 2009, p. 32), the gentlemen in this study seek to fill that void. They teach because they want to “change the face of America’s classrooms” (Cole Boyd; Morris Bowman). They are inspired to teach because someone helped them, and they want to pay that support forward (Caleb Mitchell; Shawn Wise). They are inspired by the teachers who helped them outside of the classroom, by acknowledging their socio-economic status without highlighting it or using it as a tool to embarrass them (Victor

Lucas). They felt inspired because they did not feel fulfilled in the careers in which they were working (Karlton Lattimer; Jovan Browne). They were inspired by family members who led by example (Rob Porter; Jovan Browne; Cole Boyd). They had family members who were principals, teachers, and college professors; they had college-educated parents and family members who pushed and encouraged them to do well in school (Benjamin Robinson; Caleb Mitchell; Victor Lucas; Rob Porter; Jovan Browne). They were inspired by life changes. They were inspired by God.

They were inspired by the children. They were inspired by the love and open-hearted eagerness for learning that the children displayed and their passion for working with those children (Shawn Wise; Karlton Lattimer; Jovan Browne). They were inspired by their successful interactions with young people as they performed community service. They were inspired during their student teaching experiences (Morris Bowman; Cole Boyd; Caleb Mitchell). They were inspired because they could relate to many of the struggles of the children with whom they had experiences (Lynn, 2006). They were inspired to specifically teach on the elementary level because they enjoyed working within a broader context (teaching all subjects and life skills) instead of just one subject. Though I found the sources of inspiration to be quite varied, sources included positive experiences with mentors and other significant adults in their lives as well as with youth in non-academic environments (Big Brother programs; after-school programs, etc.)

Question 3: How Does Hip-Hop Culture Impact The Identity Development And Pedagogy Of Black Men Who Become Elementary School Teachers?

The Black men in this study were all born between 1965 and 1988 and are, hence, considered to be a part of the Hip-Hop generation. This era, especially for Black youth can be defined by the music, dress, language, world perspective, and art that have come to be known as Hip-Hop culture. Hip-Hop encouraged them to think in innovative ways. Like me, many of the men in this study have been undercover critical race theorists. I say this because, like me, they recognized and critiqued the centrality of race and racism in their daily lives. This is part of the reason they cling to Hip-Hop in such a prolific manner. Bridges writes,

Much of the music and artistic expression within Hip Hop focuses specifically on racism and racist practices within the legal, political and educational systems. In Public Enemy's "Fight the Power," N.W.A.'s "F-the Police," and Dead Prez's "They Schoolz," listeners are encouraged, urban youth in particular, to resist the hegemonic powers that stifle their educational and personal development and to challenge systems through these oppressive powers are enforced. (Bridges, 2009, p. 48)

Hip-Hop encouraged them to look beyond the obvious, to look beyond what the majority told them to be true, and to step out and take risks. It opened their eyes to what was going on in the world and helped them to express themselves, feeling validated for just being Black men.

The Black men in this study understand the conscious-raising spirit of "old school Hip-Hop", but they also appreciate the money-chasing souls of contemporary Hip-Hop. The Hip-Hop music that played while they were growing inspired them to be self-

educated. It inspired them to strive for better lives. It inspired them to fight against oppression. Hip-Hop has served as a sort of otherfather to these men as it has mentored and guided them in how to approach manhood. They were immersed in Hip-Hop culture, so as they grew and were impacted by other forces (family, educators, friends, community members), something inside guided them into the elementary school classroom. I do not claim that “Hip-Hop made them do it.” However, I do believe that the conscious-raising aspect of Hip-Hop has helped them to open their eyes and critically view the world around them. Akom (2009) argues that the “use of hip hop as a liberatory practice is rooted in the long history of the Black freedom struggle and the quest for self-determination for oppressed communities around the world” (p.53). The gentlemen in this study represent the perpetuation of the struggle as they use Hip-Hop to help their students’ quest for self-determination and a liberatory educative experience. Seeing the social hierarchy, the sorting and stratification process happening in schools (and being victim of it themselves), these men became aware – at various points in their lives – that they needed to be a part of the change. They witnessed the evolution of Hip-Hop. They observed Hip-Hop as it grew and changed, so they had proof that change was possible.

Because these men grew up immersed in Hip-Hop culture, they brought their own personal histories with them to their elementary classrooms. For them, Hip-Hop is not just a music; it is a culture. It is all around them. It is all over them. They embody it. They wear it. They talk it. They walk it. Therefore, it is only appropriate that it would be prevalent in their pedagogy. They utilize Hip-Hop cultural tendencies to connect with and relate to their students. Bridges (2009)

African American male teachers use Hip Hop, as well as details from their personal histories, to reject claims of racial neutrality in U.S. society and schools. Moreover, Hip Hop, as a grassroots movement, represents the lives of urban youth as their struggle for agency in a society that perpetuates their marginalization. As the voice of this generation, Hip Hop represents a counter-narrative to the stories told about them by the dominant group and can be used to teach African American boys how to navigate an unjust society. Thus, the use of Hip Hop culture in education can be situated within a critical race theoretical framework, as it reflects the tenets of CRT, and is an example of critical race praxis – the active use of the core beliefs of CRT in urban schools and communities. (pp. 48-49)

Critical race praxis is prevalent in the stories the gentlemen in the study shared with me.

They utilize Hip-Hop to challenge dominant ideologies. They use Hip-Hop because they respect counter-storytelling. They utilize the music of Hip-Hop to help students make authentic connections to subject matter. They utilize Hip-Hop as a form of critical pedagogy to help students see beyond the obvious and learn about the world in ways that help the students expand their thinking and become critical consumers in a world that is thoroughly obsessed with the commodification of the Black male body, especially as it relates to Hip-Hop music and culture.

Hip-Hop As Critical Pedagogy

Critical educators, [Giroux 1996] argues, must consider elements of popular culture such as Hip-hop music as a serious site for social knowledge to be discussed, interrogated, and critiqued. Whether the power in its messages can be used for good or ill, few can dispute the impact of Hip-hop culture on the lives of working class urban youth. (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002)

The results are in! Much of the literature (and not just the literature of Hip-Hop scholars) and findings of this dissertation study point to the relevance and pertinence of Hip-Hop as a viable form of critical pedagogy. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) define critical

pedagogy as “a personal, financial, political, emotional, and spiritual commitment to prioritizing the needs and liberation of people who are suffering under various forms of oppression” (p.37). Black youth, those who love and live Hip-Hop, “need a pedagogy that will embrace their informal education and create ways of thinking and analyzing rap music” (Love, 2008, p. 63). KRS-One, also known within Hip-Hop and academic circles as “The Teacha”, Hip-Hop legend, icon, lecturer, philosopher, caretaker of Hip-Hop history and culture, rapper, and as one of Hip-Hop’s most prominent and foremost critical race theorists and critical pedagogues (Akom, January 2009), agrees with Giroux as well. KRS-One is known for his interrogation of issues of race, class, and politics and his critique of the American education system in his songs, on the lecture circuit, and on his website, www.krs-one.com. Furthermore, the gentlemen in this study argue that Hip-Hop has an important place in their students’ lives. They agree with Michael Eric Dyson (2001) who asserts that “[t]o ignore [Hip-Hop’s] genius, to romanticize its deficits, or to bash it with undiscerning generalities is to risk the opportunity to engage our children about perhaps the most important cultural force in their lives” (p. 138). The Black men elementary school teachers in this study adamantly concur that Hip-Hop can and should be utilized as a way to provide an education that is eye-opening and boundary-breaking. Through Hip-Hop, they find ways to respect who their students are and encourage them to stand up for what they believe in. Teachers like Mr. Wise, Mr. Boyd, Mr. Bowman, Mr. Lattimer, and Minister Browne recognize the importance of staying close to their students so that they can know who their students are listening to and help provide guidance and support if needed. Mr. Porter, Mr. Mitchell, and Mr. Robinson enjoy

utilizing Hip-Hop as a way to “facilitate the development of critical consciousness in urban youth” (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002, p. 89). Even further, Bridges (2009) concurs that “[u]nderstanding the history of Hip Hop and the social and political critique embedded within its artistic expression provides contemporary urban youth with an understanding of the libratory origins of this art form” (p.10).

A Freeing Perspective On A Hip-Hop Identity

When I consider my perspectives on what Hip-Hop is as a culture and as an identity, in the literature, and in my research, I have come to the conclusion that Hip-Hop is not entirely “misogynistic.” Are there skewed images of women? Sure. Does the current status of Hip-Hop make it difficult for girls and boys coming of age amidst the bombardment of commodified, sexualized images to develop a strong sense of self? Absolutely. I do not argue that corporate America’s exploitation of Hip-Hop has vehemently skewed Hip-Hop’s original intention (outlet of expression and resistance against oppressive forces). What I add to this argument is that I don’t think Hip-Hop is purposefully or *completely* “misogynistic”. Instead, it is my belief that cues about how to treat women are taken from repeated examples within the American historical landscape (Spring, 2005) and then compacted to satisfy the hypermasculine image that has been perpetuated as part of what has come to be known as the “Hip-Hop ideal” (Dyson, 2007; Hill, 2009; Morgan, 1999). In the development and cultivation of this Hip-Hop ideal, it has become a magnified version of the American masculine ideal that is "opposing and superior to the feminine" (Mutua, 2006). Hip-Hop links inner-city Blacks to the majority culture’s ideals. Because achieving the American masculine ideal is impossible for many

Black men, the acquisition of money and women becomes the goal in itself (hooks, 2004; Matlon, 2010). Thus, I conclude that Hip-Hop is viewed as so immensely misogynistic, more so, because it is a concentrated culture. Further, the intense gaze and scrutiny on Hip-Hop's version of this ideal is yet another example of the intercentricity and perpetuation of racism and sexism (as Hip-Hop is scrutinized from the "outside") as well as examples of how the oppressed becomes the oppressor (as we honestly reflect from the "inside") (Freire, 2000).

Implications

I have had the humble pleasure to meet and interact with nine amazing Black men who were born during the Hip-Hop generation and serve elementary school children across this country as their teachers. Having heard, interpreted, analyzed, and shared their stories, I know there is still much to learn about Black men elementary school teachers from the Hip-Hop generation. First, a study on Black men elementary teachers from the Hip-Hop generation has serious implications for teacher education programs and school districts interested in balancing the gender and racial diversity in America's elementary-level classrooms. I identified five of the purposes for teaching that drive the participants:

- Teaching as an act of resistance;
- Teaching as an act of otherfathering;
- Teaching as a calling;
- Teaching as an act of passion; and
- Teaching as an expression of Hip-Hop.

Interested teacher education programs and school districts can utilize this information to help recruit, train, and retain Black men teachers by designing programs that provide training in liberatory educative experiences like critical hip-hop pedagogy. Also, by taking the time to learn more about what Black men are passionate about, by speaking to these passions, and providing a supportive place that encourages them to follow their innermost passions (without fear of vilification), interested agencies might be able to see an increase in the quantity of Black men who more willingly and readily decide to join the ranks of the elementary teaching force. Furthermore, it is essential for teacher education programs to know that Mr. Lattimer, Mr. Lucas, and Mr. Porter chose to become elementary education majors based on their student teaching experiences and/or discussions with their academic advisors. Hence, I deduce that student teaching and advisement had a profound impact on which grade levels the gentlemen in this study decided to teach as well.

Second, in Chapter 3, I began exploring the concept of a multidimensional Hip-Hop Feminist Epistemology. I conceptualized two dimensions: (1) a process of knowledge validation that sits within a realm of contradiction and (2) the inurement of one's own erotic power; however, I believe that these dimensions could use further cultivation. Furthermore, I believe there are more dimensions to be explored as they relate to how Black Feminists from the Hip-Hop generation come to know and interpret the world around them. Therefore, a more thorough investigation of these ideas is suggested to add to what is already a wonderful, growing body of Hip-Hop Feminist scholarship.

Third, more research is needed to unpack the impact of coaching on teaching as it pertains to all educational stakeholders, especially Black men teachers and students. Several of the gentlemen spoke passionately about their coaches and the impact that they had on their lives inside and outside of school. There are programs like the Promoting Academic Achievement through Sports (P.A.S.S) program that assists teachers make use of some of the “practical instructional strategies used in coaching” (Duncan-Andrade, 2010, p. 50) to help improve academic success. Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade also delves into this topic in his 2010 text *What a Coach Can Teach a Teacher*, so there is already a burgeoning sect of literature on this topic. Therefore, someone looking to explore this research topic would have a firm place to start.

Next, I feel that research is needed to explore the impact that Black men elementary school teachers have on Black girls and children of different racial backgrounds. The concept of fatherloss can affect all children, and girls feel the effects of fatherloss as well as boys do. How this translates into the dearth of Black men teachers would be an interesting point of study. In this dissertation study, I briefly discuss how Black girls from the Hip-Hop generation were impacted by fatherloss, and several of the participants in this study share that they feel their presence impacts girls in a positive way as well. Furthermore, they also shared that they felt that their presence impacted a diverse range of children (races and genders). Research is needed to determine the effects of Black men elementary school teachers on children of all racial backgrounds. How does their presence, and the interesting perspectives that men from

this particular generation bring to the classroom, impact all children? This is an area that warrants further exploration and discussion.

Also, there is a burgeoning knowledge base that defines and illuminates characteristics of the “Hip-Hop generation” – who we are, what we do, how we behave. However, Hip-Hop is a culture that is continuing to grow as the decades pass and to expand its reach across the globe. Hip-Hop is now 40 years old and spans the entirety of TWO generations. Thus, I see the potential for research on the possibility of a second Hip-Hop generation. How are those people born from 1985 – 2004 different than those of us born between 1965 and 1984? How are we the same? As Hip-Hop is a dynamic culture that has changed and evolved since its inception, what characteristics might a second Hip-Hop generation (one that was raised on Lil Wayne, Wiz Khalifa, and Nikki Minaj) have that sets them apart from the other generations? How might they change the world?

My last suggestion for future research involves the integration of Hip-Hop culture into curriculum. There is a blossoming scholarship on Hip-Hop pedagogy by scholars like A.A. Akom, David Stovall, Bettina L. Love, and Marc Lamont Hill. However, more research is needed on how this particular population, Black men born during the Hip-Hop generation who teach elementary school, utilize Hip-Hop in their daily practice. Not much is known about Black men elementary school teachers, but their voices deserve amplification. I touched on this topic in this study; however, this is an area worthy of being the focus of an entire research project.

Closing Thoughts

Completing my dissertation is bittersweet. I have spent so many years reading and writing, collecting data, transcribing, analyzing data, and then interpreting said data that being absorbed in this process has become major part of my life. However, as I bring this project to a close, I think about my love for Hip-Hop. I critically reflect on this relationship and ask myself the following: Does my love for Hip-Hop taint how I see it, my ability to be critical of it? Would this dissertation look different if I did not love Hip-Hop so much? I believe so. I believe that my love for Hip-Hop and my acceptance of myself as a product of Hip-Hop does impact how I problematize the inequities that exist as components of Hip-Hop culture: misogyny, violence, hypermasculinity, homophobia, commodification, etc. Does this mean that I don't see those things? No. I admit that because of where, when, and how I was raised, there are blindspots – critiques that I miss (or overlook) – in my discussion of Hip-Hop because of my intimate connection with Hip-Hop. Like that child who unconditionally loves her drug-addicted parents, I see through Hip-Hop's weaknesses, its challenges, and I still love it – despite and because of those challenges. Perhaps, Hip-Hop's imperfections are part of what make it so beautiful in my eyes. I see a culture that has suffered from “forces of external invasions, climate changes, and internal strife....” (Billingsley, 1992, p.93) and has still managed to survive. This does not mean that I do not recognize that Hip-Hop contains several elements of the meta-culture (American culture) that it was birthed as a resistance against. As Hip-Hop continues to age, these elements become more and more prevalent, so much so that mainstream Hip-Hop culture is overrun by affluenza and infested with aspects of

romanticized violence and hatred toward self, women, and the male homosexual community. I acknowledge that if Hip-Hop does not

mature to a level of self-government where it creates, regulates, and profits from its own elements, resources, and intellectual properties [, then it will continue] being negatively exploited by the recording industries of America who manipulate its public image to sell the fantasy of pimpin', thuggin', hoein', flashin', flossin', and ballin' to predominantly young White Rap fans that are impressed by such behaviors.... (KRS-ONE as cited in West, 2004, p.174)

I do not expect Hip-Hop to be the same Hip-Hop that it was in 1982 when Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five blessed us with "The Message." I do not expect this to be the same Hip-Hop that gave us "Self-Destruction" in 1987. What I do expect, however, is that there will continue to be a message and that though some will continue to be on the path to self-destruction, others will continue to warn about and fight against it. I expect Hip-Hop to mature, take back control, and begin to profit more from "its own elements, resources, and intellectual properties" than corporate America does. What my romantic view of Hip-Hop does is enable me to be gentle with it, and gentle with myself, as we grow and mature and take responsibility for the impact that we (Hip-Hoppers) have on the world.

There is, indeed, work to be done. The gentlemen in this study relayed this. They see the dysfunction in Hip-Hop and work on a daily basis to rectify the relationships that they have with it and the images that their students have of it. They do this via textual and comparative analyses of Hip-Hop lyrics, as well as discussions that expose the factual and fictitious aspects of contemporary Hip-Hop. The utilization of Hip-Hop in the classroom includes not only attempts to engage students' interest but also the

intention to engage their minds. By integrating Hip-Hop lyrics into the literary canon, educators can use Hip-Hop as a teaching platform for much more than poetry. In Language Arts, elementary level students can “translate” the lyrics from street language to Standard American English. In Science, educators can use Nelly’s “Grillz” to teach young students how heavy metals interact with saliva. In upper elementary level health classes, Eminem’s “Love the Way You Lie” can be used (with care) to teach about relationships, specifically the intricacies of domestic violence. Furthermore, there are websites like flocabulary.com that offer explicit support in helping educators integrate Hip-Hop into their curriculum. The possibilities are endless.

This dissertation has been a true labor of love for me, and now, the only thing that I want to do is listen to Common tell the story of the corner. This song is one of the songs that inspired me throughout my process. It reassured me of the power that Hip-Hop still holds and reminded me of the powerful legacy that Hip-Hop leaves behind. It’s a bridging of the gap between Civil Rights generationers (The Last Poets) and Hip-Hop generationers (Common and Kanye West). This song is a symbol for me of the hope that lies ahead and reminds me from which I come.

The Corner by Common, featuring Kanye West & The Last Poets

[Verse 1: Common]

Memories on corners with the fo’s & the mo’s
Walk to the store for the rose talking straightforward to hoes
Got uncles that smoke it some put blow up they nose
To cope with they lows the wind is cold & it blows

In they socks & they souls niggas holding they rolls
Corners leave souls opened & closed hoping for more
With nowhere to go niggas rolling in droves
They shoot the wrong way cause they ain't knowing they goal
The streets ain't safe cause they ain't knowing the code
By the fours I was told either focus or fold
Got cousins with flows hope they open some doors
So we can cop clothes & roll in a Rolls
Now I roll in a "Olds" with windows that don't roll
Down the roads where cars get broke in & stole
These are the stories told by Stony & Cottage Grove
The world is cold the block is hot as a stove
On the corners

[Hook: Kanye West]

I wish I could give ya this feeling
I wish I could give ya this feeling
On the corners, niggas robbing, killing, dying
Just to make a living (huh)

[Spoken: The Last Poets]

We're overstated, We underrated, we educated
The corner was our time when time stood still
And gators and snakeskins and yellow and pink

And powder blue profiles glorifying that

[Verse 2: Common]

Streetlights & deep nights cats trying to eat right

Riding no seat bikes with work to feed hypes

So they can keep sweet Nikes they head & they feet right

Desires of street life cars & weed types

It's hard to breath nights days are thief like

The beast roam the streets the police is Greek-like

Game at its peak we speak & believe hype

Bang in the streets hats cocked left or deep right

Its steep life coming up where niggas are sheeplike

Rappers & hoopers we strive to be like

G's with 3 stripes seeds that need light

Cheese & weaves tight needs & thieves strike

The corner where struggle & greed fight

We write songs about wrong cause it's hard to see right

Look to the sky hoping it will bleed light

Reality's a bitch and I heard that she bites

The corner

[Hook]

[Spoken: The Last Poets]

The corner was our magic, our music, our politics

Fires raised as tribal dancers and

war cries broke out on different corners

Power to the people, black power, black is beautiful

[Verse 3: Common]

Black church services, murderers, Arabs serving burger it's

Cats with gold permanents move they bags as herbalist

The dirt isn't just fertile its people working & earning this

The curb-getters go where the cash flow & the current is

It's so hot that niggas burn to live the furnace is

Where the money move & the determined live

We talk shit play lotto & buy German beers

It's so black packed with action that's affirmative

The corners

[Hook]

[Spoken: The Last Poets]

The corner was our Rock of Gibraltar, our Stonehenge

Our Taj Mahal, our monument,

Our testimonial to freedom, to peace and to love

Down on the corner...

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APPENDIX A

FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

(LIFE EXPERIENCES AND INSPIRATIONS)

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. In what ways did your experiences growing up as a student influence your desire to become a public school teacher?
3. What inspired you to become an elementary school teacher?
4. Tell me about the teachers who have had the most impact on your life.
5. What expectations did you have coming into the elementary school classroom?
6. What life experiences – prior to becoming a teacher – helped to shape these expectations?
7. What do you believe to be your role as an elementary school teacher?
8. Were your educational experiences different for you as a Black boy than they were for the Black girls?
9. Do you believe that the presence of Black male teachers in the elementary school classroom has an impact on boys? Please explain your response.
10. What are your favorite Hip-Hop songs? Why?
11. Who are your favorite Hip-Hop artists? Why?
12. Do you use Hip-Hop in the classroom? Why or why not? If so, how?

13. Given that I am interested in Black men elementary school teachers, is there anything else that I might not have thought to ask you that you want to share?

APPENDIX B

FACEBOOK FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

(INFLUENCES OF HIP-HOP AND STEREOTYPES)

1. Tell me about the Hip-Hop artists who have had the most impact on your life.
2. How has Hip-Hop impacted your life?
3. How has Hip-Hop influenced you as a teacher?
4. How has Hip-Hop influenced your teaching style?
5. How has Hip-Hop influenced what strategies you use to deliver instruction to your students?
6. What do you think is unique about Black men from the Hip-Hop generation?
7. What are some of the stereotypes about Black men teachers, especially those who teach elementary school children?
8. How do you deal with the stereotypes about Black men elementary school teachers?

APPENDIX C

BLACK MALE TEACHER FACEBOOK FOCUS GROUP DESCRIPTION

This is a Secret Group. This group has been created as a forum for safe dialogue among Black Men Elementary School Teachers from the Hip-Hop Generation who are participating in a research study. The researcher is interested in learning some of the reasons why black men become public school teachers. The researcher's goal is to engage Black men Elementary School teachers in dialogue about Hip-Hop, observe the dialogue, and look for any instances of how Hip-Hop has impacted their lives. The point of this research is to help better understand what males need in order to be successful in school and to help increase their positive experiences, hopefully increasing the number of black men who become educators (thereby increasing the amount of positive male role models for black boys in schools).

APPENDIX D

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: LONG FORM

Project Title: Hip Hop Is More than Just Music To Me: A Narrative Study Exploring the Counter-Stories of Black Men Teachers from the Hip-Hop Generation

Principal Investigator: Dr. Leila Villaverde

Project Director: Mrs. Dawn Nicole Hicks Tafari

Participant's Name: _____

What is the study about?

This is a dissertation research project. The researcher is interested in learning some of the reasons why black men become public school teachers and how Hip-Hop influenced said reasons. The researcher's goal is to listen to personal stories and look for any patterns that may arise among the educational, experiential, and cultural experiences that these teachers have had. The point of this research is to help better understand what males need in order to be successful in school and to help increase their positive experiences, hopefully increasing the number of black men who become educators (thereby increasing the amount of positive male role models for black boys in schools).

Why are you asking me?

You have been asked to participate because you are a black male public school teacher who was born between the years 1965 and 1984.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

I would like to meet with you at the location of your choosing one time in order to discuss your thoughts about becoming a teacher, as well as your reflections on your teaching experience and how Hip-Hop has impacted your life. Your honest and sincere reflections are important to this study. Please know that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions that I will ask you. I expect the interview to last about 45 minutes. If you are unable to commit to one 45 minutes segments, then we can break our interview into two 20 – 30 minute sessions. I would like to audiotape our interview so that I will have an accurate record of your words. In addition to the interview, I would like for you to participate in a Secret Facebook group called “Black Men Teachers and Hip-Hop” along with the other participants in this study. The Facebook group will be

closed to the public, and all responses will be only visible to you and the other members of the group. If you do not already have a Facebook account, then I ask that you develop one for the purposes of this study. You do not have to be “Friends” with me or any of the other participants to be added to the group. I will post questions for you to directly address and discuss as a group. Depending on the frequency of the discussion, I will post one question a day or every other day. Data collection will cease, and the group will be disbanded at the end of two weeks.

Is there any audio/video recording?

The interview will be audiotaped, and the tape will be transcribed for the purpose of accuracy. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape by storing it in a locked file cabinet. As the tape is transcribed a fictitious name will be assigned to you on the transcript. Your real name will not be used at any point of information collection or in this dissertation study. At the end of the study, the tapes will be erased or destroyed.

What are the dangers to me?

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated or if you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Eric Allen in the Office of Research Compliance at UNCG at (336) 256-1482. Questions, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study can be answered by Dr. Leila Villaverde who may be contacted at (336) 334-3475 or levillav@uncg.edu.

Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits to participants in this study. It is, however, the researcher’s hope that through this study, you will learn something new about yourself and feel validated about your chosen profession and the importance of your role within it.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?

This study may inform those school systems and teacher education programs that are interested in closing the black male achievement gap, in their efforts to recruit more black male teachers.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information confidential?

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. In order to ensure confidentiality, the researcher will assign you a fictitious name on the transcript. Your real name will not be used at any point of information collection or in my dissertation. The researcher will store the audiotapes and transcriptions at the researcher's home address in a locked file cabinet. At the end of the study, the tapes will be erased or destroyed.

What if I want to leave the study?

Your participation in this study is sincerely appreciated and completely voluntary. However, you have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state.

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing this consent form you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate in this study described to you by Dawn Nicole Hicks Tafari.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX E

DATA COLLECTION SCHEDULE

| Data Collection Schedule | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|---|--|---|
| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
| <i>April</i> 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 Caleb Mitchell (F2F) 3:30pm | 28 |
| 29 | 30 | <i>May</i> 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| 13 | 14 Shawn Wise (T) 3:30pm | 15 | 16 | 17 Victor Lucas (F2F) 3:30pm Rob Porter (F2F) 4:30pm | 18 | 19 |
| 20 | 21 Benjamin Robin- son (F2F) 6:00pm | 22 | 23 Karlton Lattimer (F2F) 3:00pm | 24 | 25 | 26 |
| 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | <i>June</i> 1 | 2 |
| 3 | 4 | 5 Jovan Browne (T) 1:00pm Cole Boyd (T) 4:00pm | 6 Morris Bow- man (T) 5:30pm | 7 FBFG created and instruc- tions e-mailed to participants | 8 | 9 |
| 10 | 11 Participants begin posting introductions. | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 Last partici- pant enrolled in the group. FBFG's official first day. | 16 |
| 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 |
| 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |
| 30 | <i>July</i> 1 | 2 | 3 Notification posted FBFG's last day will be Saturday. | 4 | 5 | 6 Last com- ments posted by partici- pants. Official last day of FBFG |
| F2F = Face-to-Face interview T = Telephone interview | | | | | | |

APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE CHART

| Name | Birth Year | Years of Experience | School Location (U.S.) | School Type | Current Grade & Subject | Favorite Hip-Hop Songs |
|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|---|--|
| Caleb Mitchell | 1979 | 11 years | North East – large urban city | Public elementary | 5 th – all subjects | “If I Ruled the World” – Nas “Dear Mama” – Tupac “Jesus Walks” – Kanye West “It’s a Good Life” – Kanye West |
| Shawn Wise | 1976 | 12 years | Mid-Atlantic– large urban city | Public K-8 | 5 th & 6 th - Math | Anything by Outkast “1986” – Big Krit “High Definition” – Rick Ross “Ambition” – Wale |
| Victor Lucas | 1984 | 1 month | South East – small rural town | Public elementary | 5 th - Math | “Juicy” – B.I.G “Superfreak” – Jeezy “Spend It” – 2Chainz |
| Rob Porter | 1987 | 1 year | South East – small rural town | Public elementary | 4 th - Math | “Satisfy You” – Diddy “Don’t Want to Waste Your Life” – LeCrae Anything by Canton Jones |
| Benjamin Robinson | 1984 | 4 years | South East – large urban city | Public elementary | Pre-K– all subjects | “Motivation” – T.I “Big Pimpin’” – Jay Z |
| Karlton Lattimer | 1970 | 18 years | South East – large urban city | Public elementary | 5 th - Math | “Thug Passion” – Tupac |
| Jovan Browne | 1977 | 7 years | Mid-Atlantic– small suburban | Christian K-8 | 4 th ; 5 th ; 6 th ; 7 th ; 8 th | “Be a Father to Your Child” – |

| | | | | | | |
|------------------|------|---------|--|----------------------|--|--|
| | | | town | | -science | Ed.O.G <i>Midnight Marauders</i> – A Tribe Called Quest |
| Cole Boyd | 1988 | 2 years | South-East – small suburban town | Public elementary | 2 nd – all subjects | “A Milli” – Lil’ Wayne “Successful” – Drake |
| Morris Bowman | 1984 | 5 years | South-East – small suburban town | Public elementary | 5 th – language arts & science (single gender) | “Justify My Thug” & “Heart of the City” – Jay Z “Keep Your Head Up” – Tupac “Dear Mama” – Tupac “Black on Both Sides” – Mos Def |

APPENDIX G

THE CALL ME MISTER PROGRAM

Two of the participants in this dissertation study are Call me MISTER graduates. Call Me MISTER is an initiative that began at Clemson University in 1999 (Clemson University, 2013). Though the program does not discriminate on the basis on gender, race, sexual preference, ability, or class, the program is designed to increase the diversity of America's elementary school teachers by preparing Black men to change the face of America's classrooms by becoming elementary school teachers by recruiting, training, and securing positions for them. The MISTER in Call Me MISTER is an acronym for "Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Models". The Call Me MISTER program was founded at Clemson University, but over the years, the program has grown to include a partnership with four HBCUs (Morris College, Benedict College, Claflin University, and South Carolina State University) as well as eight other two- and four-year colleges and universities that act as Participating Colleges. The program also boasts five National Partner Schools.

Call Me MISTER graduates assert that this is a program that accepts Black men as they are and helps them to grow by developing a personal MVP (Mission, Vision, and Purpose). They refer to the program as a "lifestyle" because during their time in the program, the gentlemen developed close familial relationships as they often they lived together, ate together, and helped one another through difficult times. Call Me MISTER

graduates speak of being “passionate” about their students and about teaching.

Furthermore, Call Me Mister graduate, Mr. Hayward Jean states the following:

We’re countering every negative thing out there. Not even just negative things that relate to Black males do, but every negative thing in society....We’re kind of leveling the playing field. We’re kind of showing how more opportunities and more options are available. MISTER doesn’t just represent Black men. It represents balancing a perspective in life and society. This time in history, this is our moment to help focus more on this group [Black men] so they can help influence and give back and help balance what’s out there already. (Clemson University, 2013)